
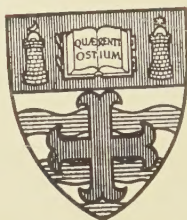
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KRYLOV'S FABLES

KRYLOV'S FABLES

Translated into English Verse

with a preface

by

BERNARD PARES

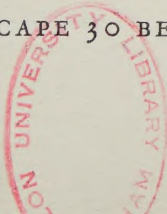
Professor of Russian

in The University of London



LONDON

JONATHAN CAPE 30 BEDFORD SQUARE



FIRST PUBLISHED IN MCMXXVI
MADE & PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY BUTLER & TANNER LTD
FROME AND
LONDON



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To
R. P.

Preface

IVAN KRYLOV was born in Moscow in 1768. His career thus follows quickly on the beginnings of modern Russian literature, and he is a father among the Russian classics. His parents lived first on military service in Orenburg, close to Asia (at the time of the rebellion of the Cossack Pugachev, described in history and romance by Pushkin). They later moved to the small provincial town of Tver. Both here and at the neighbouring town of Kolyazin, where the boy served as a clerk in the law-offices, he had little diversion but to walk on the banks of the Volga and catch up the turns of speech and mother wit of its great floating population.

He lost his father at the age of ten (1778), and at fourteen in company with his mother, to whose good sense he owed very much, he came to Petersburg, where he found work in government offices. At twenty he was an orphan (1788) and, giving up his post, engaged in literary work, writing tragedies, operas, burlesques of no special value, and helping to edit successively two periodicals. But he had trouble with the censorship, which cooled his literary enterprise, and for several years he lived an idle life, wandering from place to place and doing nothing of any note. 'It was only at forty years of age, during the period of Napoleon, that he found his talent in the writing of fables, and thenceforward he wrote nothing else, publishing various editions from 1809 to 1843, the last of which contained nearly two hundred fables. For many years of this period (1812-41) he held an easy post in the Imperial Public Library.

Krylov's instincts were full of the country conservatism of Russia which, as in Europe generally, was never stronger than after the fall of Napoleon. Upset by the shock of the French Revolution, which it was nervously trying to forget,

the world, and not only its rulers, was in a fright; and genius, plan, instruction, and in general all that has to do with light were regarded as suspect. It was the year 1812, an important one in the literary development of Krylov, that really fixed the character of the Russian and European reaction and in particular gave such a sinister influence to the rôle of the Russian Government, as leading in this reaction. This was the period when Russian mathematicians were officially instructed to base their teaching on the doctrine of the Trinity – whatever that meant; when in the Universities philosophy was made an adjunct of the Chairs of theology; when the censorship took as its principal object the exclusion of ‘godless French books,’ and when such a Commission as is described in Krylov’s *Pearl Divers*, to discuss whether learning was pernicious, practically took place. Others of his fables – such as *A Gold Piece*, *The Godless Tribe*, *Horse and Rider* and *Author and Robber* – are clearly directed against the French Philosophy and the French Revolution, and reflect a view which was all the more distasteful to the Russian ‘Intelligence,’ because the mass of it had certainly now passed to the opposite extreme. Krylov’s perspective may be discounted as belonging rather to his period than to himself, but he generally shows his own colours, as in his moral to *Pig under the Oak*. Pushkin made a happy defence of Krylov against the charge of ‘reaction,’ by quoting a line from one of his fables:

‘That tailless rat’s a friend of mine!’

Russian conservatism is a very different thing from the servility demanded by the Russian bureaucracy. Krylov, who began his best writings so late in life and who never seems to have forgotten the rather mysterious collision which he had earlier with the censorship, is the most cautious of Russian writers; but the form of the fable gave him

opportunities which other writers did not have, and against which the stupid subserviency of the censorship was sometimes powerless. This big, heavy man, a personal favourite with two successive Emperors, living on a government sinecure and for much of the day in his dressing-gown, publishing perhaps eight or nine short fables in the year, and contenting himself for the most part with watching other people, had as much independence of speech as the time would allow. His brilliant contemporary Griboyedov, who, like Pushkin, Lermontov, and other writers of this time, suffered exile for his independence, in *The Mischief of being Clever*, humorously puts into the mouth of a reactionary a wish that fables should undergo the fate of other Russian literature because 'after all the lions and other big beasts are tsars.' Krylov had to sail as close as possible to the wind, and to call up all his Russian mother wit, in order to reach his public, even on this vehicle. One fable, after its rejection by the censor, Krylov, when next at Court, recited in reply to a command from Nicholas I for his last production: and the Emperor's approval was cleverly turned into an order for publication. *Fishes Dancing*, coming at the time of a journey of inspection of Alexander I, only passed the censorship after the lion had been made to do effective justice and not, as in the original version, to pass on unenlightened. *Speckled Sheep*, written at a time of severe repression of the universities, was found in manuscript after his death. In general, the 'language of Æsop,' as it came to be called, was necessary, if one hoped to evade the censorship; and the reader was as alert to discover meanings for which we ourselves might not look – for instance, in such a fable as *Wolf and Shepherds* – as the writer was careful in his conveyance of them. The Russian Liberal of the time could forgive the native conservatism of Krylov, for he could read in this form such penetrating criticisms of Russian public life as

could not reach him in any other; and even the Russian reader of to-day will always be finding new applications for Krylov's wit. In this sense, he holds in Russian political literature a place not unlike that which fell to Béranger in France, with whom his sturdy nature perhaps has more in common than with La Fontaine, from whom he borrowed so many of his subjects.

Many of Krylov's fables bore on current events. *Crow and Fowl* is adapted to the Russian evacuation of Moscow. *Wolf in the Kennels* was written during Napoleon's retreat and was sent to Kutuzov, who is said to have received it and read it to those around him just after his successful running fight against the remains of the Grand Army on the road from Smolensk to Krasny; the old general, we are told, uncovered his head when he came to the words: 'My hair is white, if yours is grey.' *Pike and Cat* commemorates the clumsy attempt of Admiral Chichagov (the 'land-faring admiral,' as he was sometimes called) to block Napoleon's road at the Berezina.

Krylov never cared to suggest any personal applications of his fables, which he left to speak for themselves; but several of them have a personal or topical interest. *Cock and Cuckoo* was taken to refer to Bulgarin and Grech, who for some time were regarded as would-be arbiters of the world of Russian letters and indulged in uncalled-for mutual admiration. *Pig* appeared shortly after a savage and stupid attack on Krylov's literary reputation, to which he made no other reply. *Soup of Master John* is said to have been read for the first time at the close of a literary evening which, in spite of the presence of several well-known men of letters, had been spoilt by the vanity of one writer, who had taken up all the time by reading his own latest work; Krylov, on being asked if he has any new fable with him, produces this drastic commentary.

But no political or topical references can be allowed to limit the significance of Krylov in Russian literature. He goes far beyond them, just as in the fables he is far more than an adapter of any foreign material. The fables of Krylov are a picture of the Russia of his time, a picture which could only be appreciated by those who have lived long in Russia and only fully appreciated by his contemporary readers. To try to explain that which Krylov portrays would be to write a large book. The Emperor, as Krylov shows in *The Cornflower* (I. 10), a fable written for a lady of the Imperial family, is expected to be like the sun, shining equally upon great and small. Ordinarily he is represented by the lion, noble-minded, proud, impetuous, kindly, often singularly fatuous and easy to deceive, attempting more or less vainly to maintain some kind of decency in his realm by a well-meaning sense of his own duty. The Government is much too easily mistaken for a private corporation pursuing its own interests (VI. 1): its first idea, when anything goes wrong, is to punish every one all round (III. 3); it keeps so many officials that there is hardly room for any other population (VI. 18). Of the principal deputies of power, the most common types are the wolf, who is simply churlish; the fox, who is quite unscrupulous and extraordinarily *rusé*; and the bear, much the nearest to the rest of the population, amiable, blunt-headed or cunning, as the case may be, and often all three together; there is also the elephant, strong, well-meaning and stupid. The fox usually manages to get appointed Clerk to the Ministry. The ass is always clamouring for a rise in his status (I. 16, VIII. 13), which, when granted, does not do him any good. The Ministers are difficult of approach, as in *Pop-a-Pop*, of which the translation was written just after the March Revolution of 1917: Krylov is always coming true again. The great men of the realm are for the most part artificial and lazy (III. 15, IX. 11); Krylov is often thinking

of them in the fables in which he deals with idleness. Their easy-going incompetence breeds a Russian type of parasite, who appears often (III. 18, V. 18).

The principal object of Krylov's satire is the official class. As many as twenty-five of his 201 fables are about officials as such. They are everywhere, and cannot be got rid of (II. 3). They appear frequently as peculators (II. 10, 22, IV. 18, V. 24, VII. 19, VIII. 22, IX. 1); many of them are ludicrously incompetent, a subject on which Krylov dwelt more and more in his old age (V. 6, VI. 11, VII. 15, VIII. 6, 7, 8); they owe their appointments to sheer favour (V. 19, VII. 1, 22), and their punishment on the discovery of wrong-doing is a farce (V. 7, VIII. 5): Krylov recommends an alternative method (III. 20). Some are extremely plausible in getting themselves out of difficulties (III. 11, VII. 24), but these capture some sympathy much as a cheeky schoolboy might do, for they are as simple as they are clever. There is a reverse side to the picture in the spiritless official who is exploited all his life (VIII. 4), and a sadder one in the official with ability whom his master does not know how to use (V. 13, VIII. 10). One particularly unpleasant blend is the official who affects to mingle philanthropy with his self-interest, so common a type as to be known to all who have lived long in Russia, and he does so in a way that is distinctively Russian (IV. 19). With such administrators of the law, justice is a pretence (VII. 16, IX. 5).

Krylov's reminiscences of the censorship were, as we know, unpleasant. He dedicates one of his best fables to the subject (VII. 23) and there are indications of it in two others (VII. 14, IX. 4). He has almost an equal distaste for the public performer who thrives by his political respectability rather than by his talent (I. 3, IV. 4), or for the writers who, sometimes winning their impunity by the same means, set up as dictators of literary taste or leaders of thought

(I. 8, IX. 10). Russian literature was a field of battle in which, for nearly all except the cautious Krylov himself, the best that could be done was to go down with honour; and these abnormal conditions gave prominence among a very clever people to some peculiarly unintelligent critics, who come in for a good deal of Krylov's contempt (II. 23, III. 16, VII. 7). One can see a brilliant vindication of public opinion in *The Lion and the Gnat* (III. 9).

Of the very small number of educated Russians, nearly every one was in one way or another an official. Describing them as ordinary persons, Krylov lights up many features of the Russian character. Their lack of responsibility, of practical experience, and of the check of a conscious and independent public, combined with their cleverness, dreaminess and idleness, makes them specially addicted to theory (III. 10, IV. 9), and particularly to theories of foreign origin (III. 12). When these theories are political, they show a pathetic want of appreciation of the population which they wish to lead (V. 11), or of the consequences for themselves which might follow their own success (VII. 21): Krylov suggests that the solution of the problems which they essay is often much simpler than they have seen (I. 5). He deals frequently with two Russian types, the futile fusser (I. 15, III. 4, III. 6, III. 17, VI. 7, IX. 2), who is easily caught out when he practises tricks learnt from abroad (I. 14), and the plausible adventurer who so often gets what he wants (II. 15, IX. 6). In particular he is severe to the vague and aimless longing for foreign travel which was naturally so strong in his locked up country (I. 18), and gives a sketch, which many can recognise, of the futile Russian abroad (VI. 13). He has also his word to say of the counter-evil, the home-grown one, of the limited parochial outlook (V. 23, VI. 14, VII. 25), which, if it has been forced upon the Russian, is exactly what he is always trying to escape from. The result of this

and other Russian contradictions is a tendency to dash at things and to give oneself the feeling of altering them by the effort which one is making (VI. 23); and this method, while for the moment it may put one thing right, puts something else wrong, as one sees in *Sammy's Coat* (*Trishkin Kaftan*), one of the most Russian of all Krylov's fables. Another outcome of an apparently hopeless state of things, though here cause blends with effect, is the futile quarrelsomeness of so many Russians, and of so many other Slavs (II. 6, IV. 5); each of them is going to save the State and picks to pieces anyone else who might have helped him to do so; and there is always a mass of silly gossip which stands in the way of any common effort (IX. 3). In such a community, the young student, finding no one to learn from, thinks that the task is left to himself, and asks that all his elders should be cleared away to make room for him (III. 14).

! This state of things would seem hopeless if it were taken seriously. The saving factor is that it does not take itself too seriously. Krylov, in his later years, as he thought more and more of incompetence, thought more and more of laziness, an inherent feature of the Russian character which enables life to go on. He had a great deal of sympathy for it, for it was deep in himself. There is, of course, pure brainless laziness (II. 12, VI. 8, VII. 10). There is an idling laziness (IV. 15, V. 26, VII. 2), which may keep your mind busy on trifles or take you to museums without seeing them. There is philosophic laziness, which can defend itself if it wants to and, if comfort were everything, has something to say in its defence (IV. 7). There is a humorous laziness, which is its own enjoyment and produces one of the most enjoyable kinds of humour (VIII. 20). Krylov, living so much in his dressing-gown – there is a Russian word for laziness, 'dressing-gown-ness' – ended on this note in the last fable which he is known to have written (IX. 11), (the last three printed

here were anonymous, or still in manuscript at his death):

But no, he did no work at all;
That's why he goes to heaven.

That is why Russia will go to heaven, and despite all that is happening there now, most of us think that she will. It is because, though many Russians worry themselves to death, taken all round Russia does not worry. Things are not all that they seem. Beneath the wrangle of words and of theories, beneath the weight of an impossibly stupid and repressive government, there lies a world which theories and repression cannot effectually reach, an under-world not of rebellion but of broad life and humour and good sense which, in normal times, goes on of itself. The Government, the Intelligence, always more or less separate as such from the country which they claimed to represent, were, in a sense, things apart: in the main, life went on without them and even put its own instincts, as a kind of unconscious substratum, at the bottom of the Government and of the Intelligence themselves.

It is of this homely under-world that Krylov writes with love. It is from its point of vision that he contemplates all the strivings and selfishnesses of those who think that they are the main actors on the scene; and that is why the Russian Intelligence has always been grateful to him and has never seriously doubted which side he took in the issue between the great of this earth and the small. He writes of the world left out or crushed down (II. 4, III. 21, IV. 2, 20, IX. 5, 13), and it is somehow not a miserable world but a genial one infecting all that has tried to detach itself from it with its own kindness and good nature, which cannot be taken from it and are the sources of its own content. That is the real Russia, which exercises so powerful a charm not only over all its own people, but over all who live long amongst

them. In the list of Krylov's titles of fables there is one word that figures first more often than any other (fourteen times), and that is the peasant. He is there as the representative of all that is human, for it is the animals that fill nearly all the rest of the stage: wise or foolish, in misfortune or good luck, somehow dealing with his daily difficulties, shrewd even in his foolishness, seeing close into man or beast, a master at evading major troubles, not committing himself to anything but his own instinct and the future, re-appearing by thrift and industry after he has seemed to be beaten down; above all, continuing to live and to fill his accustomed place – the peasant is throughout the real hero of Krylov's tales.

Krylov's fables are a treasury of the vernacular, of the mother wit, and of the morale of the Russian people. They have passed almost wholesale into proverb, and are among the favourite reading of all Russian children and grown-up children – that is to say, of all Russians; and even in his adaptations from La Fontaine and others, Krylov never for a line ceases to be original and typically Russian. This is the interest and value of his work. One could hardly hope to preserve anything of this in a translation, but that over and over again there is an English idiom which corresponds to the Russian, and that Krylov, like other Russian Slavophiles or Conservatives, has a far nearer kinship with the substance and manner of English thought than with those of any other nation; the only possible exception that occurs is the Italian, and in particular the contemporary Italy of Manzoni and Giusti.

Krylov died in general honour in 1844, at the beginning of a new and confused period of European and Russian thought. He left some unpublished fables, and many variants of his work which show what care he spent on it. He has been freely illustrated – not only the animals of his

fables being represented, but also persons of whom the animals are types. A peculiarly pleasing monument was put up to him in the Summer Garden at Petersburg; around the sitting figure of a broad-shouldered man thinking, are gathered on the pedestal lively reliefs of the figures in his fables, and the sandy playground round the monument has remained one of the favourite meeting-places of the children of the city.

These translations, like the original, claim a certain rough latitude of rhyme. *The Village Band* is a more free rendering than the others. The Alexandrine will not do in English all that it will in Russian. Krylov's Alexandrines are of two kinds: either a strong six-foot line with a drive like the knocking home of nails, something that recalls the rhythm of Macaulay's *Armada*, or often what is really a four-beat line with a great variety of rhythm, such as could perhaps be more easily reproduced in Italian than in English. The two kinds are sometimes even printed differently, though the number of feet is the same. The second of these, especially in the longer fables, leaves a latitude for shifting the beat; but in both cases the broken *cæsura* can hardly be tolerated, except in those very few cases where it can be justified as intentional. In English the Alexandrine is in danger of falling into two lines of three feet. For this reason, though it remains as a kind of staple, I have given it somewhat less work than it has in the original. The lines of a single foot also, or even of half a foot, which are very effective in the original, cannot in every case be reproduced. The English translator has always to reckon with the fact that he has generally only one rhyme at his disposal for every ten, usually very many more, that would be accessible in Russian.

The work of translation has been a source of peace and pleasure over twenty years. I have to thank several friends

who have read my versions and especially many peasant soldiers in the Russian army during the war, who have helped me in the search for corresponding idioms, illustrating for me by voice, action, or anecdote, the shades and differences of some Russian expressions.

B. P.

Book I

CROW AND FOX

I. 1

How often have they told us, please,
 And always to no use – that flattery's mean and base?
 The flatterer in our hearts will always find a place.
 God somehow sent the crow a little bit of cheese.

The crow had perched upon a fir.
 She seemed to have settled down to enjoy her provender,
 But mused with mouth half-closed, the dainty bit still in it.
 Unhappily the fox came running past that minute:

A whiff of scent soon brings him to a pause,
 And Reynard sights the cheese, and Reynard licks his jaws.

The rascal steals on tip-toe to the tree,
 He curls his tail, and, gazing earnestly,
 He speaks so soft, scarce whispering each word:
 'How beautiful you are, sweet bird!
 What a neck, and oh! what eyes,
 Like a dream of Paradise!

Then, what feathers! what a beak!
 And, sure, an angel's voice if only you would speak!
 Sing, darling; don't be shy! Oh, sister, truth to tell,
 If you, with charms like these, can sing as well,
 Of birds you'd be the queen adorable!

The silly creature's head turns giddy with his praise;
 Her breath, for very rapture, swells her throat;
 The fox's soft persuasion she obeys,
 And high as crow can pitch she caws one piercing note.
 Down falls the cheese! – Both cheese and fox have gone
 their ways.

OAK AND REED

I. 2

AN oak got talking with a reed one day;
 'You certainly have cause of nature to complain;
 Why, even a sparrow's weight for you is quite a strain.
 At even the slightest breeze that makes the ripples play,

You quake as if you're touched with blight;
 You bend and bow so desolate,
 Indeed you are a sorry sight.

Now I, like Caucasus in all his pride and state –
 'Tis little that the rage of Phœbus I abate;
 Laughing at hurricanes, 'neath thunder's roar at ease,
 I stand as strong and straight,
 As though I bore a shield of peace inviolate.
 For you each breath's a storm, for me the storm's a breeze.
 If only you were growing somewhere close,
 Then in the depths of shade that my broad boughs could
 lend you,

From stress of weather I could easily defend you.

Alas that nature for your dwelling chose
 The banks of Æolus, the stormy realm of air;
 No doubt, for such as you she found no time to care.'
 'You are full of charity,' the reed replied with scorn;
 'But do not be distressed! My lot can well be borne!

If storms I fear, it is not for my sake;
 Though bend I must, I shall not break;
 'Tis little harm they do to me.

Methinks, for you yourself more danger there may be.
 'Tis true that up till now, beneath the fiercest blast

Your sturdy form stands firm and fast;
 From all its angry blows your face you never hide;
 But wait and see the end!

And scarce the reed had thus replied, –
 When see, all sudden from the North
 The boisterous Aquilo with hail and rain broke forth.
 The oak stood firm; the reed down to the earth must bend.

On raged the storm still fiercer than before
 Till, roaring, from his root it tore
 The tree that close to heaven his towering summit flaunted
 And in the realm of shade his sturdy foot had planted.

THE VILLAGE BAND

I. 3

JOHN SMITH invited Jones to dinner;
 'Twas not to keep his friend from growing thinner,
 But something else, you'll understand;
 He wanted Jones to hear the village band.
 The Village Band struck up – too sharp, too flat, no matter;
 They made the roof resound.
 Jones felt his ears were splitting with this clatter,
 His head went whirling round.
 'Excuse me, Smith,' said he, 'I'll eat my hat,
 If I can stand much more of that.
 Your village band this afternoon
 Is mercilessly out of tune;
 They set my teeth on edge.'
 'Well, yes,' said Smith, with feeling in his tone,
 'I'm bound to own,
 They're not musicians highly skilled;
 But all are members of the Parish Guild,
 And all have signed the pledge.'

But as for me, I'd let them drink all day
 If only they could play.

CROW AND FOWL

I. 4

WHEN Prince Smolensky's art
 Had found a way to curb the foe's presumptuous heart,
 The modern Vandals snared to ruin
 And left them Moscow town to their undoing,
 Then all, the great and small, each blessed soul alive,
 Packed up without an hour's delay
 And from the walls of Moscow streamed away
 Like swarm of bees that leaves the hive.

A crow upon a roof that slowly cleaned her beak
Surveyed the tumult, perched apart.

'Why, friend, it's surely time to start?'

Called out a hen upon a cart;

'Stands at the gate, even while I speak,

Our ruthless foe.'

'And where's the harm in that for me?'

The augur bird replies: 'I'll hold my own, you'll see;

You chicken-hearts, that want to, go!

But folk will neither roast nor stew a crow.

We'll get on well enough, our guests and I,

Who knows but I may find some dainty snacks of food,

A bit of cheese, a bone or something good?

Good luck, dear Henny, on the road! 'Good-bye!'

So Crow, she stayed behind. What else?

Why, stead of snacks her board to embellish,

When, in Šmolensky's clutch, the French took in their belts,

They cooked the crow as well, to give their soup a relish.

As blind, as foolish oft do human reckonings show.

You're close on Fortune's heels; you think you'll catch the jade,

And when the last accounts are made,

You're in the soup, just like our crow.

A LITTLE BOX

I. 5

How oft the commonest of tasks

Looks long and tiresome till begun.

To use your wits, is all it asks;

Start doing, and it's done.

'They brought John Brown a box, fresh from the workman's
hands.

'Twas work that took the eye, so neatly, cleanly done;
This charming little box delighted everyone.
Then in comes Will: – Oh yes, these things he understands;
He glances at the box. 'This box has got some trick;

You see it has no lock;

And yet I warrant you, I'll have it open quick;

You boobies over there, don't mock!

Just wait! I'll find the catch, then show the trick to you.
In matters of this kind I know a thing or two.'

He sets to work, leaves nought untried;

He turns it round on every side;

He guesses and he guesses;

One knob and then the next, and then the handle presses.

John looks at him and all the while

Just shakes his head,

And James and Ned

Whisper among themselves and smile.

From time to time some onlooker will say:

'Not that way! No, not there!' But harder still and harder
He puzzles, he perspires, till damped is all his ardour;

He gives it up and puts it on the shelf.

And why not raise the lid? He never tried that way!

This was a box that opened of itself.

FROG AND BULLOCK

I. 6

A FROG that watched a bullock grazing near
Resolved she'd try her best to match his girth and height;
She was an envious frog, I fear;
See how she puffs and swells and strains with all her might;

'Come, tell me, Quacky dear, am I as big as he?'
 She asks a froggy friend. 'Oh no, my dear, not nearly.'
 'Now just you watch me stretch! Look close, and tell me
 clearly.

Well, then! You see?
 I'm filling out?' 'It don't seem much to me.'
 'Well - now?' 'Just like you were at first.'
 At last her wild attempts the bounds of nature passed;
 She never swelled to bullock's size,
 But strained so hard, she cracked and burst.
 She's not the first, and not the last;
 No wonder, when the little shopman tries
 To match the splendour of the Provost's board,
 And Hodge the farmer's son spends money like a lord.

THE DAINTY SPINSTER

I. 7

A LADY, young and fair, to marry feels inclined;
 No harm in that, I find;
 The mischief is, she's so particular;
 He must be talented, a man of spotless truth,
 Distinguished and well-born, and in the prime of youth;
 (You'll own that her demands go rather far);
 He must be everything; and where's the man that is?
 Then please to notice this!
 He must be true to her, but not the slightest jealous.
 Exacting! Still she shows so fair among her fellows
 That suitors of the choicest sort
 Drive daily to her door to pay her court;
 But when she has to choose, she's squeamish as can be.
 Some maids, with such a pick, would think themselves in
 clover,
 But she - just looks them over:
 'No suitor there will suit for me;

You never could expect so poor a lot would pass! –

One lacking in distinction, one in class,
And one, who has them both – poor boy, he's got no
money;

Another's nose is squat, another's eyebrows funny.'

One's that, and one's not this;

In short, there's none of them will suit my dainty miss.

The suitors sued no more; a year, and yet a year,

Before another lot appear,

A batch at second-hand who had so far failed to please.

'What simple souls are these?'

Our scornful beauty cries, 'Are they the sort for me?

Now really these might let the matter be;

They're not the kind of men, you know,

That I bowed out two years ago.

What! Wed some vulgar clown – Tom, Dick or
Harry –

Good heavens! They'll tell me next that I'm in haste to
marry.

I like my single life, I'm happy and light-hearted;

I sleep so sound all night, I laugh and sing all day;

'Twould be a sheer disgrace to throw myself away.'

So all that second lot departed.

Now hearing of this total clearance,

Young men were not so quick to put in an appearance.

A year goes by,

And none apply;

Another year is gone, and now another goes;

Oh dear! Why don't the men propose?

Our spinster's now a trifle elderly.

She counts the comrades of her youth,

And time she has to count, in truth;

Rose married long ago, and Anne will next July.

It's getting clear, they've passed her by.

The lovely girl begins to pine away;
And look! the mirror shows – it's getting past concealing –
That bit by bit, and day by day,
The thievish hand of Time her loveliness is stealing:
The colour first, and next the brightness of the eyes;
Now in the pallid cheek no pretty dimple lies;
Her mirth, her sprightliness – they seem to have slipped
away;
And through her tresses peep a lock or two of grey.
Misfortune every way!
Time was when at the ball the very room seemed hers;
Then throned around her steps a mob of worshippers.
But now, alas! alas! it's 'Don't you play at cards?'
No more the ruder sex our beauty disregards;
Her reason bids her marry while she may:
Her pride has passed away.
Though maids may look at men with eye fastidious,
Their gentle hearts will always speak for us.
What? Live and die alone? She can't, she can't, indeed!
A mate she'll find, ere Time his ravages shall triple.
The first that came to hand did not have long to plead;
And glad she was, yes glad indeed,
To take a hopeless cripple.

PARNASSUS

I. 8

WHEN out of Greece they drove the gods of ancient days
And portioned out their land to folks of common kind,
Parnassus to some farmer was assigned,
Who on the sacred mount put asses out to graze.
These asses somehow came to know
That Muses lived there along ago.

To all the herd 'twas very clear
 Why master sent them out up here;
 'The Muses are played out,' they said;
 'It's us they want to sing instead.'
 'Why then, come on,' says one, 'now make a lusty start;
 I'll strike up first, and each must take his part;
 No shyness, boys! 'twould be absurd!
 We'll chant the glories of our herd;
 Louder, ay, louder than the sisters nine,
 We'll form the asses' choir and raise our hymn divine.
 And if some wilful voice outside our canons passes,
 We'll keep this golden rule, which ass-like I may call: -
 Whoever has a voice that fails to please us asses,
 He shall not sing up here at all.'
 This cunning, quaint and curious speech
 Appealed in ass-like way to each;
 And such a discord rose from all the noisy throng,
 As if a train of wagons rolled along
 On twenty thousand wheels, and each one wanting grease.
 How ended this uproarious glorious song?
 Their master, for his peace,
 Bade drive them from Parnassus to the stable.

 I hope no ass my nose will pull,
 If with a trite remark I end this fable;
 Once you have an empty skull,
 No post you get will make it full.

THE ORACLE

I. 9

IN some old heathen shrine a wooden idol stood.
 It answered all you asked, the future it foretold;
 And as the counsel that it gave was good,

From head to foot one bright display
 Of gifts of silver and of gold,
 It shone in sumptuous array,
 O'erwhelmed with offerings and dinned with endless prayer
 And stifled by the incensed air.
 The credit of this idol was immense,
 When all at once – oh shame, oh wonder –
 The oracle began to blunder;
 Its answers now had neither shape nor sense.
 Whoe'er the questioner, whate'er the question,
 It could not make a single sound suggestion.
 In fact it puzzled every one,
 To guess where its prophetic gift had gone.
 The point was this: –
 This idol had a hole. 'Twas here the priest would hide
 And here the answers jockeyed.
 So while the priest had brains, no answer came amiss;
 But once you had a fool inside,
 The idol too turned blockhead.

They say – no doubt 'twas long ago –
 Some magistrates were so,
 Men who to all the world seemed clever, very
 As long as they'd a clever secretary.

THE CORNFLOWER

I. 10

A CORNFLOWER on the field full blown
 Shrank as it were to half, fell blighted with a breath;
 Down bowed the stalk, the weary head sank down,
 And so he sadly waited death.
 Meanwhile to the western wind he whispered piteously:

'Oh if the daylight would but come again,
 The glorious sun go up and lighten all the plain,
 Who knows? With him might come new life and strength
 for me.'

'Now there's a simple soul,'
 Exclaimed a beetle, digging at his hole;
 'The sun, he fancies, has no other occupation
 Than just to see how he is growing,
 Whether he's withering or blowing.
 Believe me that for that nor time nor inclination
 With him abound.

If you could fly like me and go the whole world round,
 You'd see it everywhere; the meadows, fields and corn
 'Tis he that wakes to live, 'tis he that can adorn.

His gracious splendour warms
 The mighty spreading oak, the cedar tree that towers,
 And with a thousand variable charms
 He clothes in rich attire the pretty perfumed flowers.
 But all these flowers, agree,
 Are far removed from thee;

They are so precious and so fair to see,
 That Time himself is loth to mow them down.

Thou hast no glory and no scent!
 Why plague the sun in vain with thy poor discontent?
 Be sure, no ray of his o'er thee will e'er be thrown!
 Then cease, importunate, these empty dreams to cherish!
 In silence perish!'

But no! The sun went up, and nature woke and thrived;
 On all the realm of flowers he showered new life, new
 light;
 And our poor cornflower too, that withered in the night,
 Beneath his heavenly gaze revived.
 Oh you to whom the high decree of heaven
 Greatness has given,

Bethink you of my sun! Let him your model be,
And see!

His rays beneficent, no matter where they pass,
Rejoice the cedar tree, rejoice the blade of grass,
And scatter on their path content and happiness.
And so the sight of him in every heart shines bright,
As crystals from the east throw back the light,
Till all alike his goodness bless.

GROVE AND FIRE

I. 11

IN choosing friends, choose well!
The mask of comradeship pure selfishness will wear,
And yet it sets for you a snare.
The better in your mind this simple truth to bear,
List to the little tale I tell!

A spark, one winter morn beneath some trees still shone,
Left by a caravan that camped there for the night;
But hour by hour went by; the spark was nearly gone;
He found no fuel and was scarce alight.

The spark bespoke the grove, in hope to mend his plight: -
'Dear grove, if I may make so bold,
Say, why has Fate so wreaked his rancour on you
That there you stand with ne'er a leaf upon you,
So bare and naked to the cold?'
·

'I lie so deep in snow,
My buds can't blossom and my leaves can't grow,'
The grove sends answer to the breeze.
'Come!' says the fire, 'That's rubbish, if you please.
Make friends with me! My help is stronger than you know.
I'm brother to the sun. 'Neath winter sky
He does no mightier deeds than I.

Go to the hot-houses, and see!
There in the winter, midst the snow and blinding storm,
Plants shoot and blossom, snug and warm,
And thanks to no one else but me.
It is not nice, oneself to praise,
And boasting is a thing I hate;
And yet the sun's own strength I find is not so great.
Shine as they may, those proud and haughty rays,
Here on this bivouac a powerless light they cast;
But close to me, you see, the snow is thawing fast.
So if in winter too you'd like to keep your prime
As in the spring and summer time,
Just make me in your shade a bed!
The matter's soon arranged. The spark, with fuel fed,
Is now a fire; the fire is on the move;
Along the twigs and boughs he flies;
Thick smoke in clouds and balls goes upward to the skies,
And soon the cruel flame has gripped on all the grove.
It burned till all was gone; and where the pleasing shade
A shelter from the heat for passing strangers made,
Now nothing else was left but stumps all charred and
frayed.

And so 'tis bound to be,
When fire makes friendship with a tree.

BULLFINCH AND HEDGEHOG

I. 12

A BULLFINCH, shy and fond of solitude,
Chirps to himself one morn, in merry mood;
No thought of listeners, nor even of anything:
He simply feels inclined to sing!
Just then, in pride and majesty,
The radiant Phoebus from the sea

The horizon scales;
 He seems to bring with him new life for each and all.
 To greet the glowing ball,
 The thickets echo to the choir of nightingales.
 My bullfinch stops. 'Oh dear!'
 A hedgehog murmurs with a sneer,
 'Your song I do not hear!'
 'Alas, my little voice is not so good,
 That I can honour Phoebus as I should,'
 Poor Bully answers in despair;
 'Of him, with notes like mine, to sing I would not dare.'

And I my bird's affliction share
 That, Pindar's lyre denied, my voice I dare not raise
 In Alexander's praise.

WOLF AND LAMB

I. 13

THE weak, against the strong,
 Is always in the wrong.
 Of this in history, examples you may see;
 But we're not writing history;
 So here is what the fables have to say.

A lamb approached the stream to drink one sultry day;
 And things were destined to go wrong;
 It chanced a hungry wolf came prowling round that way;
 The wolf espies the lamb and marks him for his prey,
 But, wishing to observe due order all along,
 Calls out:
 'How dare you with your dirty snout
 Clear water – yes, my water – so begrime
 With mud and slime?

Oho! You dare to scoff?

I'll tear your silly head right off!

'If only the most princely wolf allows,
I'll venture to report, the stream comes down to me
A hundred yards away from His Serenity.

Here is no wrong, his anger to arouse;
I could not foul his drink, not even were I to try!

'That means to say, I lie!

You scoundrell Tell me when such insolence was uttered!

Why, now I think of it, 'twas you two years ago

Stood there as I came by, and muttered.

My friend, I've not forgotten, oh dear no!

'But really, you mistake. I'm not yet one year old,'

The unhappy lamb replies. 'Well, then it was your brother.'

'I have no brother, Sir.' 'Why, then some friend or other,

Or anyhow some lamb belonging to your fold;

Why, all you sheep alike, your hounds and shepherds too,

You wish me harm and always will,

You're always looking out to try to do me ill.

For all these injuries I'm reckoning with you!

'But I, where's my offence?' 'Enough! You'd talk all day.

You think I've got the time to count your crimes, you
pup?

Your guilt consists in this: I want to eat you up!

And to the forest's depths he dragged the lamb away.

APES

I. 14

to borrow other's ways, your wits must be awake,

And then the gain can be immense;

But imitate without the sense,

And, bless you, what a mess you make!

The example I shall choose, in distant climes I found.

Whoever saw an ape, will know

How quick they copy all you have to show.

Well, out in Africa, where apes abound,

One day a goodly company

Sat on the branches of a leafy tree

And slyly watched a hunter on the ground.

Amidst the grass the man rolled round and round!

Each nudged her neighbour secretly;

Each whispered to her furry friend:

'Do watch the man! Just look and see!

What heaps of tricks he's got! There isn't any end!

Head over heels he'll sprawl,

And then make wheels, then crawl,

And next he'll fall,

Rolled in a ball,

Till legs and arms don't show at all!

We're quick enough at learning here;

Why can't this nice new game be played by us?

Come on then, sisters dear,

We'll take it up; it looks most curious!

He seems to have rolled about as much as he's inclined;

Perhaps he's going: then we all can' – There!

The hunter's really gone, – he has left his nets behind.

'Now, come along!' they cry; 'You have no time to spare!

Who'll find this secret out?'

The pretty dears came down. To please his furry pets,

The man had spread below an endless maze of nets.

In them they somersault, and romp and rout,

Or cuddle close, or twine about;

They shriek, they scream, – oh dear, what splendid
fun!

The joke was only done,

When first they thought of getting out.

His chance, meanwhile, the hunter spied;
 'Twas time; to each nice guest he came with bag in hand.
 Of course, to bolt they tried;
 The nets held fast: not one could squeeze outside;
 He bagged them – all the monkey band.

TOM – TIT

I. 15

TOM-TIT comes sailing down the coast;
 He has made a boast,
 He means to burn the sea!
 Of such a strange event the world talks anxiously.
 In Neptune's capital the frightened dwellers swarm;
 The birds in squadrons form;
 The beasts of all the woods come streaming in to see,
 How well the sea will burn, and what the heat will be.
 'Midst those who'd heard the news, borne far on wings of
 fame,
 The ordinary diner-out was there;
 With silver spoon in hand, among the first he came
 This new fish soup so luscious to enjoy,
 A dinner such as ne'er the richest millionaire
 Has given to those in his employ.
 All press close up, agape to see this sight;
 In silence at the sea they stare, and still they stare,
 And someone whispers here or there:
 'Now! Now! You'll see it steam! You'll see it light!'
 'Not there! It's burning? No, it's not.
 It's hotter! No! Not even hot.'
 What happened in the end to all these boasts and bragging?
 Back to his nest in shame our hero had to flee,
 Tom-Tit had set all tongues a-wagging,
 But had not burned the sea.

I think I feel inclined to add,
 Without offence to anyone,
 To boast of deeds is surely bad,
 Before the deeds are done.

THE ASS

I. 16

THE day when Jupiter first peopled all the earth,
 And gave the various tribes of beasts their birth,
 The ass came somehow into being too.
 But whether of intent or having much to do,
 The cloud-compeller took no note.
 And so the ass came out no larger than a stoat.
 Like that, the ass was scarce worth observation,
 And yet a prouder beast there's not in all creation.
 The ass was longing to attract all eyes,
 But being such a tiny size,
 He simply felt ashamed to stir.
 So my conceited ass kept plaguing Jupiter
 With prayers that he would make him bigger.
 'Why, think!' says he, 'it can't be borne at all;
 Pard, lion, elephant, they each cut such a figure,
 Among the creatures great and small
 The talk's eternally of them.
 And why the ass so cruelly condemn,
 That honours lists go by without him,
 And no one cares to speak about him?
 If even the height of calf you'd let me be,
 I'd stop the lion's pride, the leopard's vanity,
 And all the world should talk and talk of me.'
 Next day again
 The ass took up the old refrain;

And this at last became so tiring,
 Thought Zeus: 'Oh let him have whatever he's desiring;
 I'll set his mind at ease.'

The ass became a portly kind of cattle,
 Besides he got a voice that made so strange a rattle,
 That now my long-eared Hercules
 Made all the creatures' marrow freeze!
 'What beast is that, and from what pack?
 Sharp teeth, I guess! and lots of horns, no doubt!'
 In fact the ass was soon the one thing talked about.
 How did it end? 'Twas scarce a year, alack!
 Ere every one knew all about the ass.
 For sheer stupidity his name had come to pass;
 And all put burdens on his back.

In stature, as in rank, that height's the thing is plain;
 But if your soul is low, it hardly seems a gain!

MISS MONKEY AND HER SPECTACLES I. 17

MISS MONKEY found her sight got weak as she grew older:
 But human friends of hers had told her,
 'That is a trouble which one very soon dispels;
 You only need good spectacles.'
 She made a trip to town, where several pairs were sold her.
 Miss Monkey turns them every way;
 She puts them on her head; she sticks them on her tail;
 She licks them, sniffs at them, but all of no avail;
 They're useless – try them as she may.
 'Disgusting!' she exclaims, 'A pretty fool am I!
 And what will men be saying next?
 This talk of spectacles is all a lie;

I find they do not help at all.
 Miss Monkey feels so worried and so vexed,
 She takes and bangs them on the wall
 Till all around the splinters fly.

And men you'll see just like her, any day;
 His best possession, when its worth he cannot rate,
 A fool will every way depreciate;
 And if the fool's a man of high estate,
 He'll throw the thing away.

TWO PIGEONS

I. 18

THERE lived two pigeons; each to each was dear as brother;
 They would not eat or drink, the one without the other.
 Wherever one might be, his mate was surely there;
 Come grief, come happiness, in all they loved to share.
 They never took account how quick the hours went past;
 Its shadow sorrow threw, but dullness never cast.

Now where could either find delight
 Without his sweetheart and his friend?

Yet no: one birdie yearned to take a distant flight
 And get to know by sight

The wide world's wonders without end,
 Distinguish false from true, sift fact from idle tale.

'How can you,' says his mate, with plaintive wail,
 'Oh why go roaming far from here?

Or do you want to leave your dear?

O shame upon you! If you don't mind if I cry;
 Think of the ravening birds, the dreadful storms, the traps.

A journey's manifold mishaps!
 Or wait at least till spring, before so far you fly.

I promise to agree, whatever then you would;
But now our stock of food so pitiful and small!

And there! You heard the raven call?

Be sure that bodes no good;

Oh stay at home, my dear one, do!

I am so happy here with you!

I cannot see what need to haste this journey on;

And life will be so sad, the moment you are gone.

The traps, the birds of prey, the lightning – dearie me!

Each night in all my dreams they'll be.

The fear of your distress will never leave my brain;

The smallest cloud that's overhead,

"Where is he?" I shall say, and fancy you are dead;

Or haven't food to eat, or shelter from the rain.'

Her friend is quite upset to hear her speaking so;

He pities her at heart, but dearly longs to go.

The wish in all his hopes, in all his thoughts appears.

'Don't cry, my pretty one,' 'tis so he calms her fears,

'For just three days, no more, I'll go a-wandering:

I'll notice everything so quickly as I fly,

And when I've seen the sights, – the ones that catch my
eye,

I'll soon be back again beneath my dear one's wing.

Then think of what a road there'll be for us to trace!

I'll not miss out an hour; I'll mention every place;

There's nought you shall not hear, – their doings and their
ways,

And every marvel that I see,

'Twill almost as I talk, lie there beneath your gaze,

As if you too had flown all round the world with
me.'

Well, there it was! The friends exchanged a kiss sad-
hearted,

And said good-bye and parted.

Our traveller's on the wing; rain pelts; the storm winds
blow him;

The blue steppe, like a sea, lies bare all round below him.
Where shall he turn? Good luck! A withered oak is near.

Our little pigeon finds a foothold here,

And clings to it in fear;

But from the biting blast it lends but meagre shelter;
He shivers, he's wet through: the rain pours helter-
skelter: —

At last the storm dies down. The sun is hardly shining,
Our poor persistent bird for further flights is pining.

He shakes his wings and starts; he flies, and on the ground

In a hollow, by a copse he spies a field of wheat,

He swoops, — our little bird lands straight into a net.

Bad luck, bad luck all round!

He twists, he turns, he tears himself to bits;

By luck, the net is old and somehow lets him through;

He's only sprained a leg, his feathers crumpled too;

But what of that? He's off, though hardly in his wits, —

When, worse than all before, a hawk from God knows
where

Comes plunging headlong through the air:

Poor bird, you still have sights to spare!

With all his strength, he makes a frantic dart,

Alas, his spirit fails and all his powers slip him,

And now the ravening claws are reaching out to grip
him,

And now the great broad wings strike chill into his heart,

When see an eagle from the skies descend;

He strikes the hawk with strength like steel;

The ravener's met his match and makes a ravener's meal.

Meanwhile our little friend

Fell plummet-like to earth and squatted out of sight.

But Fate even now still sought to wreak her spite:

Misfortune never comes alone;
 A child took up a shard and flung it at his head, –
 To children pity is unknown;
 The little pigeon's temple broke and bled.
 So now our traveller, with one wing crushed and maimed,
 With head split open and with one leg lamed,
 Cursing the world's seductive spell,
 Crept wofully back home ere further harm befell.
 And count him happy still, for friendship waits him
there,

His stricken soul to bless.
 In friendship he will find a doctor's help and care,
 With friendship will forget all trouble and distress.

Oh you who so much yearn to travel without end
 The whole wide world to view,
 First read my little fable through.
 Haste not your happiness on that far road to send;
 Whatever joys that dream has promised to your mind,
 No distant search, be sure, a fairer land will find
 Than that which holds your love, your true devoted friend.

A GOLD PIECE

I. 19

WHAT use is education?
 Much use of course, no doubt at all,
 But by that name too oft we call
 The search for any new sensation,
 Which even turns to dissipation.
 It calls, be sure, for more than common care,
 The crust of boorishness from simple souls to tear,
 And yet in doing so no qualities impair,

Not undermine the will, not spoil the character,
 Not make them lose their simple ways,
 And underneath a hollow glaze
 Their natures, 'stead of raising, only smur.
 The lessons which this truth conveys
 Might fill a Sunday book of saws and adages;
 But 'tis not every one that serious sayings please;
 So half at least in jest,
 Let what I mean in fable be expressed.

A simple peasant – such abound –
 Espied a sovereign on the ground;
 A stained and dirty coin it was he found;
 And yet, they tell the man, with pennies thrice
 They'll gladly fill his fist, if he should care to sell.
 'You wait a bit!' thinks he; 'I'll make you raise your
 price;

If I can work a small device,
 They'll snatch it from my hands and buy the hands as
 well!'

So finding chalk and bark and sand,
 And powdering a piece of brick,
 My peasant puts the job in hand,
 And, working hard and quick,
 He grinds the sovereign on the brick,
 He scrapes it with the bark,
 And rubs it with the sand and chalk.
 To make it shine like fire was all the peasant's trick;
 But though as bright as fire the sovereign shone, 'tis
 true,

The work when finished
 Had quite diminished
 Not only weight but value too.

ONE, Thomas Brown, a sinful man, –
 Despite his good wife Nancy, –
 Espoused two others, Jane and Ann,
 But of his deed the King was soon apprised;
 This king was strict, and had no fancy
 To leave such rascals unchastised.
 The man of many wives he ordered to arrest;
 The judges were to find the punishment that best
 Would teach a wholesome fear,
 And make his subjects see, by one decisive test,
 No room for imitation here!
 ‘And if,’ said he, ‘I find that justice is not done,
 Around your council board I’ll hang you every one.’
 This was no joke!

Each judge ran cold with fear and perspiration.
 Three days and nights on end, of various plans they spoke: –
 ‘Now what can we devise that meets the situation?
 For punishments abound, but which among them, pray,
 Has ever checked the rogue that meant to have his way?’
 However, in the end, a light from heaven they see;
 The criminal is called, to hear the declaration
 Of their adjudication;
 Unanimous, on full deliberation,
 They sentence him – to keep all three.
 At first the people marvelled at this sentence;
 ‘The king will have those judges hanged,’ they said;
 But, ere a week had sped,
 Poor Thomas Brown in dire repentance
 Himself had jumped the rope, and to his grave was carried.
 So terror fell on all; and so, they say,
 Three wives at once, thenceforward to this day,
 No subject of that king has ever married.

THE GODLESS TRIBE

I. 21

A CERTAIN tribe of old, to every people's shame,
Became so hard of heart, to ways so wilful given,
It raised its impious hand to fight with heaven.
With banners to the tryst the rebel legions came;
With bows and slings the host marched noisily to war.
The leaders of the plot, the boldest there,
To make their fellows storm and rage the more,
Declared the Court of Heaven was cruel and unfair;
The gods themselves all slept, or else were dull and lazy;
'Twas more than time to teach them what was what,
And from the adjacent hills 'twas relatively easy
 To bring them under range of shot
 And pelt Olympus thick with darts.
These madmen's taunts and threats disturbed the Olympian hearts;
The inhabitants all joined before their King to plead
 For succour in their hour of need.
 Indeed,
The council of the gods was nearly all agreed
That just to teach a lesson, 'twere no blunder
 To work at least some minor wonder.
A flood, a hail-storm fairly great,
An earthquake – that might put things straight,
Or even a shower of stones their ardour might abate.
 'Let's wait!'
Spake Jupiter. 'If no respect can rule them,
If reckless to the end, they riot against heaven,
 Why, 'tis their own misdeeds shall school them.'
Then, at a shout, the air was riven
With streams of darts and stones from those battalions bold,
But all came showering back with death a thousand-fold,
Cruel and ruthless on their authors' head.

The fruits of unbelief to deadliest terrors turn;
 Ye peoples, look on this and learn!
 The daring doubts which seers of sacrilege have spread,
 With which they arm your hand to compass heaven's
 undoing,
 Bring close to you yourself the moment of your ruin
 And fall, like showers of darts, on your unfaithful head.

EAGLE AND FOWLS

I. 22

REJOICING in his strength one radiant summer morn,
The eagle scaled the skies above,
On high to rove,
Where lightning shafts are born;
Then plunging, all at once, down from the cloudy heights,
To rest his royal wings, on lowly shed he lights.
An eagle, you may say, some nobler perch should seek,
But kings, you know, have fancies of their kind;
To honour that poor shed, maybe, he had a mind;
Maybe, to suit his rank no fitting perch could find: –
Nor horned oak, nor granite peak;
Well, why I cannot say: there perched the royal bird,
Nor from that barn-door stirred
Except to reach the next, and later on a third.
A common barn-door fowl took note of this,
And to her feathered friend objected:
‘What makes the eagle so respected?
The way he flies, my dear; of course, that’s what it is!
Now really, though it’s not exciting,
I too can flit about, on humble barn-doors lighting;
In future, please, too sensible we’ll be
To think the eagle is of rank so high;
He’s shorter in the leg; he’s smaller in the eye;

He's just like other fowls; and now, we clearly see,
 He flies as low as we.'

Vexed with her futile talk, the eagle thus replied:

 'You're right; but there's another side –
 Lower than barn-door fowls the eagle sometimes flies,
 But never barn-door fowl was known to scale the skies.'

 When you your betters criticise,
 To reckon up their faults don't task your wits in vain;
 But, seeing what in them is great and strong and wise,
 Learn, if you can, yourself their various heights to gain!

Book II

THE FROGS ASK FOR A KING ✓ II. 1

ONCE in the froggies' favour
 Democracy had lost its savour;
 Life somehow seemed to them to lack a certain flavour
 Without a lord, beneath no sway.

Their discontent to allay,
 They begged the gods to send a king without delay.
 Though as a rule the gods don't care to list to trash,
 This once, however, Zeus in answer to their prayer
 Sent them a king. Their king came hurtling through the air
 And plumped upon their realm with such a smash,
 That all their spongy State was squelching with the
 crash.

With leaps and bounds in fright,
 The frogs went off full fling;
 They skipped aside to left and right,
 And in their holes, with awe, they whispered of their
 king.

And certainly the choice was happy as could fall;

He was not fussy, was not heady,
 Discreet and dignified and steady,
 With giant's girth, as giant tall,
 In every detail worth his salt;
 He only had a single fault, —

This king was just a poplar log, that's all.
 At first, accounting him a personage too high,
 No subject dare approach; each trembles, halts and blushes;
 They peep at him with fear, and that with half an eye,
 Spy furtive from afar between the wind and rushes.

Well, as the world has nothing strange
 On which the eye will not get used to range,
 So, too, these frogs, who first with fear stood faltering,
 At last came crawling up with homage to their king,

Some still abashed before such pride,
 But soon the sprightliest will boldly turn his side,
 Or try it on by squatting near;
 Some sporting frog, with spirit and with grit,
 Will even show the king his rear.
 The king is kind; he does not mind a bit!
 And next, whoever likes, as all grow bold and bolder,
 Will jump upon his shoulder.
 In three short days, this king had bored them to perdition;
 The frogs put in a new petition,
 That Jupiter would send to rule their marshy State
 A king that was a king indeed;
 He to their earnest prayers gave heed,
 And sent them down a stork, to be their potentate.
 This king is no mere blockhead, never budging;
 Indulgence? – Not that way his princely nature lies;
 He eats the guilty up, and at his high assize
 There's none that's not amiss;
 In short, it comes to this:
 At breakfast and at lunch, at supper too, – he's judging.
 In all that marshy quarter
 The year goes swart and swarter;
 The census of the frogs is always running shorter.
 The king, from morn to eve, goes stalking round their
 town,
 And every frog that on his path he spies,
 He judges straight, and gulps him down.
 Now worse than e'er before the groans and prayers arise,
 That Jupiter again
 Would make a change of sovereign.
 'Our present king,' they cry, 'like flies he snuffs us out;
 It is not safe – we well may cry alack! –
 To show a guileless nose or give a harmless quack.
 In short, this autocrat is worse than any drought!'

'Why had you not the sense to live in peace before?
 Was it not I, poor fools,' declared the voice from heaven,
 'To whom no moment's rest was given?
 Not you, that dinned my ears a ruler to implore?
 You had a king, – too mild he was and quiet;
 In all your swamp you raised a riot;
 A second king is come, a cruel one and fierce;
 Well, learn to live with him, or look for even worse!'

LION AND LEOPARD

II. 2

IN times long out of mind,
 The lion and the pard were constantly at war;
 Some thickets, dens and woods, – 'twas these they wrangled
 for,
 To study who was right, they did not feel inclined;
 In questions of this kind,
 The strong are often blind,
 They settle matters by their lights;
 The one that wins has all the rights.
 However, in the end, you can't fight every day;
 You'll wear your claws away!
 The heroes both resolved to end the fray:
 All war-like operations they would cease,
 All issues disentangle,
 And then, as usual, conclude a lasting peace, –
 Till next they wrangle.
 'The hatchet let us bury!
 Let's each appoint a secretary,'
 The pard invites his foe, and as the two agree,
 So let it be!
 For instance, there's the cat; he's not at all pretentious,
 But he's the beast I'll choose; he's very conscientious.

And you can choose the ass, a beast of high degree, –
 I guarantee in short,
 Of cattle there are few so dignified as he;
 Believe me, as a friend; your Council and your Court
 Won't half be worth his hoof, you'll see.
 We'll both subscribe to that,
 Which he
 May settle with my good old cat.'
 The lion found the leopard's plan
 First rate,
 But only not the ass, – the fox should be the man
 To act for him in this debate;
 He murmured to himself, – the world he clearly knew, –
 'The friend your foe commends, is not much use to you!'

STATESMAN AND THINKER ✓ II. 3

STATESMAN and thinker once enjoyed a quiet chat
 On this and that;
 'Tell me,' the statesman said: 'I know you are a sage:
 For you the hearts of men are like an open page;
 How comes it, in whate'er we found,
 Law court, academy, and all the rest,
 You've scarce a minute to look round,
 But there the same old fools have made their nest?
 Is there no way to stop the rot?'
 'Well,' said the thinker, 'I'm afraid there's not.
 There's no new institution,
 But breeds its dissolution.
 A wooden house my meaning best will show.'
 'You mean –' 'I mean, my own will serve you for a text;
 The house-warming is Friday next;
 The worms were busy long ago.'

THE PLAGUE OF THE BEASTS II. 4

A PLAGUE, heaven's direst scourge, the worst of nature's ills,
 Goes raging through the woods: the beasts lose heart;

The gates of hell wide open start;
 Death gallops o'er the plains, the gullies and the hills.
 All strewn about the ground, his piteous victims lie:
 The inexorable hand has mown them down like hay:

Some still drag out their life, but they
 See death a yard in front, and almost wish to die.

Not one the same; all hearts have sunk;
 In face of woes like these, they seem with panic shrunk.
 The lambs have peace: the wolf is humble as a monk!
 The fowls sleep safe: the fox fasts in his den so dreary;

To eat he hasn't got the heart;

The pigeon and his mate now live apart;

No thoughts of love to memory start,

And, where no love is, how can hearts be cheery?

The lion, in this stress, proclaims a solemn meeting;
 They struggle to the spot, with scarce the soul to walk,
 And gather round their King, without a word of greeting,
 And gaze, and prick their ears, to hear him talk.

'My friends,' their King begins, 'transgressions unforgiven
 Have brought on us the heavy wrath of heaven;

So let that one of us who most has wrought of ill,

All of his own free will,

Himself as sacrifice present;

It may be that the gods therewith will be content;

And thus the zealous fervour of our faith

Their cruel anger will appease;

For all of you, my friends, know well that heaven we
 please,

When willing victims go to death,
 And history is full of such-like instances.

So in all humbleness,
Let each one here aloud his sins confess,
Of thought or word or deed, whatever was amiss;
Dear friends, confess, and penance do;
Alas! I own – what pain to tell you this! –
I'm guilty too.
Poor little lambs – and why? they never injured me, –
I've mangled piteously.
And sometimes – which of us is good? –
The shepherd, too, might be my food.
So gladly I myself would proffer;
But first 'twere best that all should count their failings o'er,
And him, in whom the greatest we deplore,
Him for the victim we will offer,
And that, no doubt, will please the powers of heaven more.'
'Oh King, our noble King,' says Reynard, 'you alone,
From nobleness of heart, would here transgressions own;
Well may our conscience twinge, when you such deeds
condemn,
But all would starve to death if that were everything;
Besides, beloved King,
Be sure that to the sheep great honour it must bring
That lions deign to feed on them.
And as to shepherds, why, we all entreat:
Do teach them oftener such meekness as is meet!
That tailless race is swelled with pride most fatuous,
And thinks that it is born to lord it over us!
So ends good Master Fox; then, in the selfsame strain,
More flatterers echo his refrain,
And each one emulates the other to maintain,
The lion's life is pure and needs no absolution.
The tiger next, and bear, and then the wolves in turn
Give all to learn
They too have got to own some foibles lilliputian;

But all their most unrighteous deeds,
 Not one that whispers, one that heeds;
 And all the strong in claw and tooth
 Escape from this tribunal of the truth,

On every side

Not only justified, but almost sanctified.
 The humble ox in turn thus lows: 'We too confess
 Our sins. Five years ago, what time our winter store
 Could give no more,

The devil greatly urged me to transgress;
 And, after I had starved for nearly all the day,
 I plucked from parson's stack a little wisp of hay.'

At this the beasts began to howl and shout;
 The bears, the tigers and the wolves cried out:
 'There, there's the wicked one,' they said,
 'To eat another's hay! what wonder, then, that heaven,
 For sacrilege like his, still counts us unforgiven!
 'Tis him the impious one, him of the horned head,
 That we for all his faults to heaven will offer here,
 Ourselves to save alive, our souls from sin to clear;
 For 'tis for his offence that half of us are dead.'

"Twere just indeed,' the others cry;
 And so the ox is led away to die.

And with us men 'tis just the same;
 The man that's meekest is the man to blame.

DOGS' FRIENDSHIP

II. 5

ONCE Bob and Rover lay
 Outside the kitchen wall, a-basking in the heat.
 Though at the gateway of the yard
 They might with greater pomp have kept their guard,

Yet as they'd had their fill of meat –
 And well-behaving dogs by day
 Don't bark at those who pass their way, –
 The pair began to chat, and talked and talked away
 Of every mortal thing – the work they had to do,
 Of evil and of good, and last, of friendship too.
 Said Rover, 'What could fortune happier send
 Than all your life to live with tried and trusted friend,
 To help each other out if trouble should arise,
 To sleep, to eat beside your brother,
 To fight like heroes for each other,
 To look with fondness in your comrade's eyes,
 To see that not one wasted chance went by
 To amuse your friend, to make his hours more bright,
 And in his happiness find all your own delight?
 Supposing now, for instance, you and I
 Such bosom friendship were to try!
 The time would go so fast we should not see its flight.'
 'Come on, my boy, all right!'
 With ardour comrade Bob replied,
 'Dear Rover, many a time I've felt so mortified
 That here are we, two dogs, together day and night,
 Yet hardly pass a day without a fight!
 And why indeed? As master is so good,
 We've lots of room and lots of food.
 Besides, it's quite absurd!
 Men take us as a type of friendship: tell me then,
 Why friendship between dogs, like friendship between men,
 Is not a thing of which you've heard!
 Let's show them that to this there is not any bar!'
 'Come, give a paw!' cried Rover. 'Here you are!
 And so the new-made friends at once embrace;
 Each licks the other's face,
 So glad, they hardly know with whom to match their case.

'Orestes!' 'Pylades!' 'Brawls, envy, spite, begone!'
 Just then, alas! the cook threw out a splendid bone.
 And see! the new-made friends are on it like a flash.

Accord, agreement melt like wax.

Orestes, Pylades, they bite, they tear, they gnash;
 They fill the air with clumps of wool;
 What parts the pair at last? Cold water on their backs!

Of friendship such as this the world is full;
 In fact, 'twould seem, of friends there's scarce another kind;
 Describe one pair of them, and all the rest you cover;
 To hear them talk, you'd say they had one heart and mind;
 Then throw them down a bone, and there's your dogs all
 over.

SHARING UP

II. 6

SHARING a business house with common ledger,
 The partners in an honest trade
 A very pretty pile had made,
 And now accounts were closed and each his profit weighed.
 For few is sharing up an undiluted pleasure,
 And while the argument gets higher still and higher,
 A neighbour rushes in and bellows: 'House on fire!'

'Make hastel make haste, and save

The house and stores!'

Cries Partner Brown: 'Come out of doors!

The accounts at present we can leave.'

'All very well, if first my hundred I receive!'

John Davies shouted;

'I shall not leave this house without it!'

'Two hundred's due to me. The accounts are clear as day!'
 Cries Partner Jones. The rest won't have it any way!

It's 'Why?' It's 'How?' It's 'No! you're wrong!'
 The fire is treated as a joke.
 These silly fellows keep it up so long,
 The fumes their angry voices choke,
 And they, their spoils, their broils all vanish into smoke.

And in affairs far greater, that I know,
 I've seen how all concerned have gone to ruin so;
 By way of joining hands to meet the common blow,
 Each starts some wrangle of his own
 For self and self alone.

A CASK



II. 7

A MAN once asked his friend
 If for a day or two his cask he'd lend.
 To help a neighbour, none should fail.
 If money's what they want, why that's a different tale;
 Such help we may refuse, and friends should hardly ask;
 But who'll be stingy with a cask?
 The barrel was returned, when it had served its task,
 And filled with water as before;
 In only one respect, results were hardly good;
 His loan a borrower makes use of how he would,
 And just for those two days 'twas wine that there had stood;
 So now the smell came out in all that touched the wood,
 The beer, the lemonade, and even in the food.
 The owner did his best a year and more;
 He steamed it out, he left it in the air,
 Put this or that inside, —
 A hundred ways he tried;
 But still the smell of wine was there.
 No help for it! They threw that cask away.

Let fathers not mistake; this tale is for their ears.

The evil learnt in early years

We only need but once to know;

Thenceforth in all your deeds and actions it will show;

Be speech and bearing as they may,

The taint is with you all the way.

WOLF IN THE KENNELS

II. 8

A WOLF that came to scale the fold by night,

Did on the kennels light;

The kennels, straight, are live as day;

The hounds, that scent so near their old grey enemy,

Throng at the kennel doors and press to meet the fray.

‘Ho, boys, a thief! a thief!’ the keepers cry;

The court-yard gates swing back; the bolts that instant fly;

The place is hot as hell next minute.

With doughty club comes one,

The next with gun.

‘Bring lights,’ they cry, ‘bring lights’; and some for torches
run.

Wolf at the corner sits, his stiff grey back well in it;

He shows his snarling teeth, he bristles up his hair;

He looks as if his eyes would eat them then and there;

But as with dogs it’s folly to begin it,

And after all, it’s certain quite,

There’s no free mutton for to-night,

Our sly old wolf thinks right

To try a parley,

And glibly thus he starts: ‘My friends, why all this pother?

I’m your old friend, your long-lost brother!

I’ve come to sign the peace; why look so fierce and snarly?

Let's all forget the past, 'tis common cause we'll make;
 Not only I myself no more your sheep will take;

I'll gladly fight all others for their sake,
 And swear, as truth in wolves abounds,
 That I . . . 'Not quite so smoothly, pray,'
 Head-Keeper here finds time to say,
 'My hair is white, if yours is grey.'

For my idea of wolves I long have had my grounds;
 And this, the plan I've always tried;

I count no truce with wolf is ratified
 Before I've stripped him of his hide!

And straightway on that wolf he launched his pack of
 hounds.

THE BROOK

II. 9

A PEASANT by a brook poured forth a plaintive lay;
 He sang his heavy loss and his abiding woe;
 His favourite lamb not long ago,
 The neighbouring river swept away.

At this sad plaint, the brook cried out in angry tone:
 'Oh stream insatiate, what if those depths of thine
 Were just like mine,

For all men manifest and known,
 And all the world could see within that slimy bed
 The victims of thy greed, so ruthlessly devoured!
 In shame to some abyss thy torrent would have showered,
 Or deep in gloomy gullies cowered!
 Were thy good fortune mine instead,
 Could I, like thee, with generous current flow,
 I'd count myself a pride to nature;
 I would not hurt a living creature!
 What care, what delicacy I would show

Towards each hut, each shrub that I might chance to pass;
The country-side around should bless my name indeed;

I'd bring new happiness to valley and to mead;

I would not pluck one blade of grass!

So all along my path dispensing nought but good,
To no one doing harm and nowhere leaving pain,

My waters should go onward to the main,
A strong and peaceful stream, a pure and silvery flood!
So spake the brook, no doubt believing all he said.

What followed? Ere a week had sped,

A thick cloud settled on the mountain's brow
And burst.

For wealth of waters, little Brook's a river now;

But ah! His earlier temper is reversed.

That foaming stream no bank or barrier will allow.

He seethes and roars, sends up great clots of filthy froth,

Time-honoured oaks tears down in wrath;

Far off you hear the branches smash and shiver;

And even that shepherd, whose complaint he to the river

Of late in terms so eloquent preferred,

Is swept to ruin with his herd;

No trace of his abode is left in all that quarter.

There's many a little stream that runs so smooth and clear;

His murmur is a pleasure to the ear;

The only reason, this: he carries little water.

FOX AND MARMOT

II. 10

'WHITHER away so fast, and in such trepidation?'

Fox asked a Marmot passing by.

'Oh dear true friend,' was the reply,

'I'm slandered and disgraced, dismissed for speculation.

You know they made me judge among the poultry kind,
 I lavished on that work my health and peace of mind,
 Took hardly time to snatch a bite,
 Went short of sleep each night;
 Then, out you go, and serve you right!
 It's all a cruel lie; you too will realise
 That no one's honour's safe, if once we go by lies.
 Me peculate? Why, have I lost all sense?
 I'll put the case to you: take any evidence;
 Is that the sort of thing that I should do?
 You've only got to think it out!
 'A lie, of course,' says Fox, 'though several times, it's true,
 I've noticed feathers on your snout.'

My friend the Inspector seems in such despair
 As if to-night the bailiffs will be there,
 And, truly, all the town's aware
 He couldn't spare a shilling for his life,
 No more his wife:
 Yet, bit by bit, just watch and wait,
 He builds a little house, he buys a small estate.
 Though how his income squares with what he pays away,
 You'll never prove in court, no doubt,
 Yet right or wrong, I'm sure you'll say:
 'I've noticed feathers on your snout!'

WAYFARERS AND HOUNDS

II. 11

 IN shades of evening shrouded,
 Two friends walked peacefully in earnest converse joined,
 When sudden from a gate behind
 A mongrel hound came yapping out,
 A second, then a third, and then in rabble rout
 The dogs from all the yards until the street was crowded.

One of the pair took up a stone to throw;
 The other called to him: 'That's folly: let it go!
 You'll never make them stop their clack;
 'Tis only worse you'll rouse the pack;
 I know the animals; come on, and don't look back!'
 Another fifty yards they go upon their way;
 Indeed, 'tis less and less the angry mongrels bay,
 Till in the end the noise had simply died away.

And there are curs that needs must raise
 A howl at all that others praise;
 Go straight upon your way, and don't attempt to stop it:
 They'll howl, and then they'll drop it.

GADFLY AND ANT

II. 12

SPORTING, frisking, gadding fly
 Warbled all the summer through,
 Scarce had time to turn her eye:
 There stands winter, full in view.
 Now the fields lie bleak and dead,
 All those days of sunshine fled,
 When she found 'neath every blade
 Bed and breakfast ready made.
 Winter falls, and gone is plenty;
 Cold and hunger spread their wings;
 Now no more the gadfly sings;
 Where's the joy that singing brings, -
 Singing when the stomach's empty?
 Moping, mumbling all the day,
 To the ant she crawls her way.
 'Take me in now, there's a dear!
 I shall soon get stronger here;

Till the spring is on the wood,
 Keep me warm and give me food!
 'Friend, but that seems odd to me;
 Do you mean you did not see
 Summer's work makes winter good?'
 'Where could time for that be found,
 In the silky grass our bower, -
 Singing, sporting hour by hour,
 Playing till my head went round?'
 'So you - ?' 'So I did not care;
 All day long I sang my ditty.'
 'Sang your ditty? Lor, how pretty!
 Now you're free to dance out there.'

THE LIAR

II. 13

RETURNED from foreign parts a few days since,
 A certain nobleman - most probably a prince -
 Was walking with a friend across the open plain,
 And bragged of lands where he had been,
 With bits of truth at times, and lots of lies between.

'No, no!' said he. 'Of what I've seen
 I shall not know the like again!

Now, what's this country worth?
 Too hot, too cold, and all along
 This sun of yours is always wrong;
 First the snows of winter hide him,
 And then he shines so bright, you can't abide him.

Well, there's a little heaven on earth;
 Bright thoughts its memory still excites;
 You need no furs; you need no lights;
 No darkness there; it's endless day;
 The whole of God's good year is one long month of May.

And no one plants or sows there;
 But if you only saw what grows there!
 For instance, once in Rome I saw a cucumber –
 Heaven help me, Sir!

I never shall forget the sight;
 Believe me, it was quite a mountain's height!
 'Good heavens, how marvellous!' his friend replied,
 'The earth is full of wonders, far and wide,
 Though 'tis not every one to whom they're plain.
 Why, we ourselves are now approaching something strange,
 A thing that never came within your range,
 And that I will maintain.

You see, out there, a bridge across the stream,
 Which we have got to cross: though simple it may seem,
 It's quite of a peculiar class:
 There's not a liar here will dare that bridge to pass;
 Perhaps half-way across he'll stumble;
 Then, sure as ever, off he'll tumble.

Who tells no lie,
 May drive a coach and four quite safely by.'
 'Oh really! What's the depth below?'

'Eight feet or so –
 Well there, my friend, you see
 A perfect novelty.
 So, though your cucumber is great, I can't deny –
 About a mountain's size, it seems to me you said?'
 'A mountain? Well, a hill; or say a house instead.'

'Now, who'd have guessed it?
 Yet, strange as I've confessed it,
 No stranger than our bridge, a hundred yards ahead;
 For safe across it lets no liar go.

Why, just this spring, you know,
 From off that bridge there fell,
 As all the town could tell,

Two journalists, one tailor too;
 Your cucumber, a house's size? Well, well,
 'That's wonderful, if quite correct.'
 'Well, not so strange as you'd expect.
 A house – that means much more to you;
 You don't see our big buildings everywhere;
 A house out there,
 Is large enough that two should just creep into it,
 And then not stand or sit.'
 'So be it, yet 'twere scarce a blunder
 To count your cucumber a very wonder,
 If two could even squat inside it;
 But take our bridge! – All liars who have tried it,
 May get along a yard or so,
 Then down they go.
 So though your cucumber is wondrous, very –'
 'Look here!' exclaims our traveller, 'I don't know
 Why we should cross the bridge. Why can't we find a ferry?'

EAGLE AND BEE ~ II. 14

'Tis well with him whose part in public must be played.
 All through it keeps his spirit warm
 To know the world will watch the deeds he must perform;
 Yet honour also him, down yonder in the shade,
 Whose unrewarded toil through long and weary days
 Can win no glory and attract no praise:
 One only thought to cheer his labour: –
 His work will benefit his neighbour.

Absorbed in one big flower, there worked a busy bee.
 An eagle, watching her, made slighting exclamation:
 'With all your knowledge and your industry,
 Such toil excites commiseration.

What thousands in your hive all summer mould and mould!
 And who, hereafter, will behold,
 Still less appreciate, your share?
 To me 'tis strange that you can care
 To toil away your life, to toil, – and what in view?
 To die without a name, amidst a nameless crew!
 What difference 'twixt me and you!
 When rising in my strength, my sounding wings I spread
 And soar in freedom overhead,
 On every side I scatter dread.
 The feathered folk all fear to mount into the air;
 Alert the shepherd guards his fat sheep grazing near;
 To show herself abroad the nimble-footed deer
 When I go roving, will not dare.'
 'To thee,' the bee replies, 'all honour and all praise!
 May Zeus still shed on thee his bounteous gifts divine!
 But I was born to toil for others all my days.
 My own small share, I ask not to define: –
 My only comfort this, when on our cells I gaze:
 That there amidst the rest, one little drop is mine.'

THE HARE A-HUNTING

II. 15

THE beasts come out to hunt one day;
 They chase the bear from far and wide;
 In open plain they kill their prey,
 And next the spoils divide.
 Each hunter claims his share:
 The bear's left ear is seized, by – who d'you guess? – the hare.
 'What, squint-eye, were you there?
 Where do you spring from, then?' the beasts around him cry,
 'Why, no one saw you till we'd killed the bear!
 'But, boys, look here!' rejoins the hare,

‘Who was it scared him from the forest? I,
 And drove him to the plain to die, –
 Our late lamented friend!’
 This kind of boastfulness, though no one’s sense abusing,
 Seemed so exceedingly amusing,
 A tuft of Bruin’s ear was given him in the end.

We mock the boaster: all the same
 In sharing up the spoils he often gets his claim.

PIKE AND CAT

II. 16

WHEN cobblers take to making pies,
 And cook his hand at cobbling tries,
 You’ll look for useful work in vain;
 A hundred times it has been plain,
 There’s no more hardened fool nor more inane
 Than he who leaves his trade, his neighbour’s job to spoil.
 He’d rather squander all his toil,
 He’d rather live
 A laughing-stock on earth,
 Than go to men of sense and worth
 And ask or hear the counsel they can give.

The pike with jagged teeth once thought, how nice
 To set up as a cat and catch some mice!
 Perhaps the Evil One inspired the envious wish;
 Perhaps he’d simply had enough of fish;
 Well, be it as it may,
 He came to Thomas Cat: ‘Oh, Tom, don’t say me nay!
 Arrange some sport in Huggins’ barn,
 And take me mousing for the day!’
 ‘Come, come! But that’s a trade one has to learn!’

Says 'Thomas in a friendly way;
 'Look out, my lad, or you may meet disaster,
 It's not for nought that people say,
 The work should fear its master.'
 'What stuff you talk, dear boy! That mice my wits should tax!
 What me! that caught the stickle-backs!
 'Come on then, here's to luck!' They went, they waited:
 And Tom had sport and soon was sated;
 He thought he'd see if Jack was sound and hale;
 But there lay Jack, so pale,
 Mouth open, eyes dilated;
 The rats had gnawed away his tail
 So finding work like this his partner's strength beyond,
 Tom dragged him back half-dead and got him to the pond;
 'And serve you right!' says he. 'Perhaps, Jack Pike,
 You'll know now what it's like;
 So now I hope you'll wiser be,
 And leave the mice to me.'

WOLF AND CUCKOO ✓

II. 17

SAID wolf to cuckoo-bird, 'Good-bye, my neighbour dear!
 Alas, for flattering hopes that I could rest me here!
 The men, the dogs, the same bad temper show,
 Ill-natured one and all! You'd need be saint, at least,
 To keep from fights with man and beast.'
 'And, neighbour, have you far to go?
 And where's that honest folk, that home of rest
 In which you think to live in peace and harmony?'
 'Oh, I'll not stop until I see
 The woods of Arcady the blest;
 Ah, neighbour! That's the happy land.
 You talk of war – and none will understand.

The men are mild as lambs, you know,
 And there with milk the rivers flow;
 Why! put it in a word – the age of gold is there.
 There each his neighbour tends with all a brother's care;
 There even the dogs, they say, don't bark by day or night –
 Not only never bite.

Come, say yourself, how sweet 'twould seem,
 Dear friend, if only in a dream,
 At last to find repose beneath such skies!
 Good-bye, and all fair memories!
 Why, there I too may go my way
 In peace, content and pleasure;
 Far else than here, where danger lurks all day –
 At night the uneasy couch that knows no leisure!
 'A happy journey, then, my neighbour dear!
 Says cuckoo: 'But your teeth, and your nice character –
 You take them too, or leave them here?'
 'What! leave them? Never fear!'
 'Then mark my words, my friend! You stand to lose your
 fur!'

The lower be your mind,
 The more to criticise in other folks you find!
 For such there's none that's good, where'er his eye may fall;
 Himself is first to quarrel with them all.

COCK AND PEARL

II. 18

A COCK that picked a dunghill round,
 Turned up a little pearl he found.
 'Now where's the need of this?' says he;
 'It's useless as can be.

How stupid of the men to prize it so!
 For me, upon my word, I'd find it far more thrilling
 To spy a barley-corn. It mayn't be much to show,
 But then it's filling.'

A favourite notion, where the mind is small,
 That what's no use to you, can be no use at all!

OLD MAT AND HIS MAN

II. 19

IF some great danger looms across your way,
 Ahl then you'll pray with all your heart
 To any that can take your part.
 But once the danger's far away,
 There's some will turn and scold the man that saved the game,
 And haste to pick his work asunder;
 And if they don't make out he's quite to blame,
 Well, that's a wonder!

Old Mat with his good workman Steve
 Was walking in the wood at eve,
 When suddenly a bear was on them nose to nose.
 Before old Mat can call out twice,
 The bear has got him like a vice!
 He hugs him, turns him round, his frame he crushes in;
 He's only choosing out a good place to begin;
 Old Matthew's eyes begin to close.
 'Oh, Steve, good Steve, don't leave me here to die!'
 From underneath the bear is heard his piteous cry.
 But our young Hercules has stiffened to the full
 Those sinews strong and staunch;
 He swings his axe, and smites off half the skull,
 Then drives his pitch-fork home clean through the creature's
 paunch;

Bear roars, and tumbles to the ground half dead.
 While there he breathes his last,
 Old Matthew, now the danger's past,
 Heaps curses on his saviour's head.
 Poor Steve stands rooted to the spot;
 'Here, come! What's that for, Mat?' 'You dolt, you ask for
 what?
 For God's sake drop that foolish grin!
 Your clumsy axe has spoilt the skin!'

A TRAIN OF CARTS

II. 20

A TRAIN of carts with pots moves slowly on in line;
 The road falls steep and straight;
 So leaving all the rest upon the top to wait,
 The driver guides the first a-down the sharp incline.
 The good horse almost bears its weight upon his spine,
 The quick, revolving wheels to stop.
 A colt, still waiting on the top,
 Pours out at every step a flood of empty prate: –
 'Now, there's a charger! Don't he look it?
 He sticks there like a crab! First rate!
 Look there! He nearly hit that stone. Oh lord, how crooked!
 He should have gone to left, that's plain.
 Step out! Now, there he jolts again!
 A simple donkey! Up-hill, yes, – all right,
 Or if it were by night,
 But all down-hill, in open day!
 It drives me wild, so poor a show;
 Best carry water-butts, if that is all you know!
 You see me sweeping down! I'll show the way!
 No fear! There shan't be any lagging!
 We'll see it's rolling with our cart – not dragging!'

And now he's arched his back, and stretched his chest,
 And sets his cart a-going like the rest;
 He makes a dash and scampers like the wind;
 The cart begins to sway and presses close behind;
 It jolts him in the back, it jerks him in the side;
 He breaks away, and gallops down full stride;
 How jolly!
 Each stone, each crevice, and there comes a bump,
 A thump!
 Left, left! the cart goes smash into the gully,
 And master's pots, away they jump!

 How many of our friends we find this trick repeating!
 They stand and blame a neighbour's work all day;
 When they themselves must show the way
 The pranks they play,
 Would take some beating!

THE RAVEN CHICK

II. 21

 AN eagle on the flight
 Came swooping on the fold, seemed scarce to light
 And bore a lamb away.
 A pert young raven chick was gazing at the sight;
 This exploit seemed to make him gay;
 'If really you're to take,' thinks he, 'then take your fill
 Or where's the use to smirch your bill?
 Some eagles, I can see, are anything but bold!
 Why, are there only lambkins in the fold?
 Now I, were I to care
 To plunder there,
 Would see I found myself more royal fare!
 Young raven mounted to the skies;
 He swept the flock with greedy eyes;

He measured up each lamb,
 Each dam,
 Each ram;
 Comparing all he saw, he singled out at length
 A ram, but what a ram!
 The fattest and the fullest grown!
 To lift it from the ground, a good-sized wolf would groan.
 His mark once known,
 He gathered for the swoop, then, plunging forward-thrown,
 He gripped it by the wool with all his strength.
 Oh then indeed he saw this prey was not for him;
 And what was worst of all, the ram that caught his whim,
 Possessed a coat so rank and rough,
 So tangled, twisted, taut and tough,
 That when he tugged and strained to get his claws away,
 This daring chick soon cried: Enough!
 Himself a prisoner! So ends his bold essay.
 The shepherds carefully his tangled claws unwound;
 For fear their sheep he run away with,
 They trimmed his little wings all round,
 And gave him to their bairns to play with!

I rather think for us, the example is not wasted!
 Let no small cheat
 With bigger birds of prey compete!
 Where big thieves may go free, the little ones get basted.

ELEPHANT AS GOVERNOR

/ II. 22

 WELL may we dread
 Strong arm, weak head;
 If heart is weak as well, then count the man no good.

They chose the elephant for ruler of the wood.
 The average elephant has brains, it would appear;
 But every family has something queer;

His Lordship here
 Possessed their size immense,
 With little of their sense.

My lord would hate to hurt a fly;
 Well, once there caught this kindly ruler's eye
 A strong petition that the sheep had just sent in
 To make the wolves refrain from tearing off their skin.
 'You rogues!' cried elephant. 'What's this? An ugly job!
 Who ever gave you leave to rob?'

'Oh no, Sir,' say the wolves; 'it's quite an institution!
 You let us, for our winter dress,
 Collect from all the sheep a modest contribution.

If they cry out, why, that's their silliness;
 We take the hide, no more, in each good sister's case,
 And that they yield with little grace.'

'So that's it!' said the judge. 'Well, you take care!
 Injustice is a thing I can't abide;

The law allows, so take the hide!
 And but for that you're not to touch a hair!'

ASS AND NIGHTINGALE

II. 23

THE ass once met the nightingale,
 And said to him: 'I'm glad I've met you, boy!
 They all keep telling me your singing is a joy.

Let's hear you do a scale!

I want to know what all this talk's about,
 If you're as wonderful as folks make out.'
 Then all the nightingale's delightful arts were shown;
 In every key that's known,

He chirruped, or he piped, held on, or trilled some lay,
 Then softly sank to tenderest tone
 That echoed yearningly, like flute that's far away,
 Then flooded all the wood with bursts of chatter gay.

 All nature stayed to hear
 While Dawn's delicious songster trilled;
 The breezes sank to rest; the choirs of birds were stilled;
 The drowsy herds gave ear;
 In rapture, at the song, the shepherd lay entranced,
 And fondly at his dear,
 Listing the nightingale, from time to time he glanced.
 It ceased, and nodding grave, the ass his judgment gave,
 'Not bad at all,' he said; 'in fact, my boy,
 It's music one can quite enjoy.
 But how your heart would warm
 To hear our cock perform!
 Just think of all the tricks you'd learn
 If for a hint or two, to him you'd turn.'
 But my poor nightingale, at verdict of this kind,
 Dashed off, and left in flight, fields nine times three behind.

And God deliver us from critics half as blind.

Book III

IN gorgeous palace lived a certain millionaire;
 His food was choice and rare;
 Each day was held some banquet at his table;
 His treasures were innumerable, –
 Sweetmeats and dainties of the highest price,
 Of all far more than would suffice;
 You might have called his house an earthly paradise;
 Yet all in vain were these delights:
 He could not sleep of nights.
 Perhaps he feared at God's dread bar to stand,
 May be, was just afraid of ruin;
 No matter! Lack of sleep was simply his undoing;
 And if by chance he could command
 A dozen winks at dawn, still trouble was at hand –
 The music from next door; there dwelt a cobbler poor,
 But one with such a turn for joking and for singing,
 From early morn till dinner-bell was ringing,
 From dinner on till night he sang, and would not cease;
 And so the poor rich man had ne'er a moment's peace.
 Could nought be done? Could no one stop it?
 Or can't he get the man to drop it?
 Forbid? One can't see how he could!
 He asked, but asking did no good.
 He thought, then sent a note, a minute's talk to claim;
 The cobbler came.
 'Ah, worthy fellow, how de do?'
 'I thank you kindly, my respects to you.'
 'How are you, James, my man? And how does business go?'
 (Suppose I want your help, your name I'm sure to know.)
 'My business, master? Pretty good.'
 'Then that's the reason why you laugh and sing all day;
 Your life runs smoothly, I should say.'

‘I won’t complain, ’twere shame I should;
 There’s plenty of good work to do;
 I have a nice young wife and loving too;
 And everybody knows, when you’ve a treasure there,
 The pleasure in your life is double.’
 ‘You’ve money, too?’ – ‘Well, no! But though I’ve none to
 spare,

That saves a lot of care and trouble.’
 ‘And so you’ve no desire to see your substance grow?’

‘That’s not at all what I would say,
 Although I thank the Lord for what I have to-day.

But you yourself, Sir, know
 You’ll never find a living creature
 That would not ask for more; ’tis simply human nature.
 I dare say, you yourself still count your treasure small.

For me, more wealth would do no harm at all.’
 ‘Quite right, my man, you’re talking sense;
 Although the rich man’s life has also got its hitches,
 Though poverty, we know, is no offence,
 Be patient as you may, there’s always use in riches.
 Now please to take this bag of shillings, pounds and pence!

I like you for your honesty;
 ’Twould make me really glad that you should thrive through
 me;
 But mind you! All this wealth you must not waste. Take
 heed,

And keep it for some hour of need.
 Here’s fifty pounds, inside are lying.
 Good-bye.’ Our cobbler, in delight,
 Picked up the bag, was out of sight,
 Not running, – flying!
 Inside his coat he pressed his treasure;
 Beneath the floor, that very night,
 He hid the bag – and with it all his pleasure.

There's no more singing now; his sleep has vanished quite –
 He too must lie awake all night;
 He starts at everything; the slightest noise he fears;
 If puss to scratch the floor begin,
 He's perfectly convinced, a burglar's breaking in;
 He turns all cold at once, sits up and pricks his ears!
 His life was now so spoilt, he might as well be drowned;
 He thought and thought all day,
 And in the end he saw his way.
 He took the bag, his patron found;
 'I'm grateful for the gift,' he hastes to say:
 'Here is your bag; I beg you, take it back!
 It's taught me what it's like, my sleep to lack.
 Enjoy your riches, as you may;
 A million pounds I would not keep
 To lose my songs, to lose my sleep.'

THE PEASANT IN DISTRESS

III. 2

ACROSS the wall of Farmer White
 A thief had climbed one autumn night;
 He forced the store-room door,
 And clearing bare the walls, the ceiling and the floor,
 Took all and sundry, worth the taking.
 Thieves aren't particular! They don't leave much;
 And as for White, his case was such,
 He went to bed quite rich, and rose so poor,
 He might have begged his way from door to door.
 The Lord preserve you all from such a cruel waking!
 Poor White, he mopes and moans all day,
 He summons all his kith and kin,
 Asks all his friends and neighbours in,
 'And can't you help,' says he, 'such trouble as I'm in?'
 Then, oh! what clever things they say!

What sensible advice from each!
 'My poor, my worthy friend' – Old Thompson makes a speech –
 'What need had you to boast for all the town to hear,
 Your riches were so great!'

Then Cousin Bill cuts in: 'Ah well, in future, mate,
 You'll sharpen up your wits, and build your store-room near.'
 'The store? It's all at sea you are!'

So argues neighbour Noggs,
 'It wasn't that the store was far:
 The thing you ought to do is, keep some lively dogs.
 You come to me, and choose you out a pup!
 'Tis one of Fan's, you know; I'm glad to give it up –
 To help a friend, why not?
 I'd only drown the lot!'

In short, from all his kin and all his neighbours kind –
 Poor fellow! – good advice is cheap as one could find:
 They'll give it by the ton;
 But help that really counts can not be had from one.

And that's the usual way! When you're beneath the hammer,
Collect your friends, recount your fate!
Advice – you'll have all sorts: the gentle and the straight!
But talk of active help – before two words you stammer,
Your best, your closest friends become
Both deaf and dumb.

MASTER AND THE MICE

III. 3

IF things begin to disappear,
And not a trace is found,
Don't turn and scold whoever's near;
And don't go punishing just anyhow all round.

The thief will not be stopped that way,
 Nor yet grow better;
 You only make good servants run away;
 And from a small mishap you'll fall into a greater.

A man who sold all kinds of food
 Once built a barn, his various stores for housing;
 But as the race of mice do stores but little good,
 He started a police of cats well trained in mousing.
 The mice now left our friend in peace;
 Patrols went through the storehouse day and night;
 It seemed that all was right,
 When trouble came in sight:
 A thief appeared in the police.
 For cats are just like us,
 And what do you expect?
 Even cat inspectors won't be all correct.
 Well! Catch the thief! Let that be first your care;
 Then punish him alone, and to the rest be fair;
 Our tradesman's way was this – whip every cat that's there!
 As soon as to their ears this clever order came,
 All cats, to blame and not to blame,
 Went trotting from that house;
 Not one was left to catch a mouse.
 Exactly what the mice awaited and desired –
 No cats at all, and food in plenty;
 Before the month expired,
 They ate the storehouse empty.

ELEPHANT AND PUG

III. 4

AN elephant was walking round the town;
 They showed him up and down;
 With us, it's seldom that an elephant one meets,
 And all the loafers crowded in the streets.

What's that? A pug comes barking in his way;
He sees the elephant and, dashing to the fray,

He yaps and yelps to left and right;
He's clearly challenging the elephant to fight!

'Now, neighbour, stop that fooling, do!' Says mastiff: 'Elephants are too big game for you.
You yap, and on he goes without the slightest flurry,

Or worry,
And - bark, for all you're worth - he won't even glance
your way.'

'Of course,' says Pug, and looks most knowing;
'That's just the hope that keeps me going,
Without the mildest kind of fight to pass,
For real wild beast, first class.

I'm hoping all the dogs will say:
Our doughty Pug there's nothing daunts,
Our Pug he barks at elephants!'

WOLF AND HIS CUB

III. 5

A WOLF had got a cub, and trained him bit by bit
To follow in his father's trade;

One day he bade him saunter down the glade
And told him, as he went, to watch with all his wit,
To see that not a chance he lost -

The wolf's a hardened sinner -
To snatch, at Master Shepherd's cost,
A bite of lunch or dinner.

The pupil soon returned. Says he:
'No time to lose! Now come along with me!'
'Your dinner's ready, Pa; you'll hardly need to bother.
Beneath that hill - you see? -

They're grazing sheep, one fatter than the other.

You've only got to take,' says Pup,
 'And sup!

And such a mighty flock, you couldn't count them up!
 'Here! Stop a bit!' says Wolf. 'Now, first I must be told,
 What kind of shepherd guards the fold?'

'Well! Not so bad, they say!

Takes pains and knows the time of day!
 But I've been round the fold; I've scouted every way;
 I've studied all the hounds; they're certainly not fat
 And mild it seemed, and poor at that.'

'I fancy your report
 Not much,' says Father Wolf, 'however well it sounds.

If shepherd is the clever sort,
 It isn't likely that he'll keep bad hounds;
 You're sure to land yourself in trouble.

You come with me! I know another fold worth double;
 I think you'll find our skins are safer there.

For there, although you'll see no end of dogs about,
 The shepherd is a lout.

Where shepherd's short of wits the dogs have none to spare.'

MONKEY

III. 6

YOUR pains are all in vain,
 You must not hope to gain

The praise and gratitude of neighbours,
 Unless some profit comes, or pleasure from your labours.

A peasant ploughed at break of day
 A furrow with his ancient plough;
 He took such trouble all the way,
 The sweat was pouring from his brow.

'A worker, no mistake!' you say;

No wonder, friends who chanced to pass,
 Called out to him: 'Well done, my lad - first class!'

This makes friend Monkey very jealous;
 So nice it is to hear the praises of one's fellows.
 Thought Monkey: 'Let me too be busy.'
 She found a log and slaved, enough to turn her dizzy.
 There seemed no doubt,
 She'd got her work cut out;
 At first, she hoisted it about,
 Then this way, that way tried to hold it,
 And then she dragged, and then she rolled it,
 Perspiring like a water-spout.
 She panted in distress: she would not take a pause;
 And yet she could not catch one murmur of applause;
 And nothing odd in that, my love!
 For no one stands to gain, however hard you shove.

THE BAG

III. 7

UPON the passage floor,
 Half hidden by the door,
 An empty bag there lay;
 The under-servants on their way
 Would wipe their boots upon him as they passed;
 Yet one fine day
 He came to high estate at last,
 And stuffed with sovereigns, as full as full could be,
 Was kept inside a box and under lock and key.
 He now was Master's favourite pet.
 Such store upon this bag he set,
 He'd scarce expose him to the air
 And settle on the bag there's not a fly would dare.
 As Master loved to show him,
 The town all got to know him,
 And if a friend dropped in to pay a call,
 He'd talk about his bag, as if it were his all;

The bag was opened too, quite often,
And each who looked inside, oh, how his eyes would soften;

And all admitted to the inspection
Would gently stroke him down or tap him with affection.
Well, seeing with the best his credit now compares,

The bag puts on such airs,
Gets clever and gets uppish;
Our bag begins to talk, and talks most awful rubbish.
Lays down the law like Solon's double,

With 'That won't pass!'

And 'He's an ass,'

And 'That, you'll see, will lead to trouble!'
All mouths would be agape: they'd hear him bleat all day,
Although such silly things he'd say,
As blight the hearing.

Unfortunately, folks are built that way;

Whate'er a money-bag may say,
Even though it's quite absurd, will set the public cheering!
But was it long our bag was praised and thought so clever?

And did they pet him up for ever?

When of those shining coins not one was left behind
The bag was tossed away, and soon was out of mind.

No feelings I would wound, but if the truth one tells,
Then aren't there Money-Bags like mine,

Now millionaires so fine,

But men who started life by waiting in hotels,

Or lounged in gambling-hells,

Who thought an empty purse an ordinary evil
Until they made their pile by sharing with the devil,
With whom Lord Short-of-Cash, the Prince of Candle-Ends

Are friends,

Who in the smartest house in town,
One in whose waiting-room they durst not once sit down,

Cut in at cards, play endless rounds –
 A mighty thing, a million pounds!
 And yet, my worthy friends, set limits to your pride!
 I'll breathe a little word in stealth:
 'Heaven help you, if you lose your wealth!
 Exactly like my bag, you'll just be thrown aside.'

CAT AND COOK

III. 8

A CERTAIN cook, a lettered man,
 One evening round the corner ran
 To public-house close by; good soul he was, and hearty,
 And didn't want to miss poor Andrew's funeral party;
 To guard his store of meat from mice that ran at large,
 He left his cat in charge.
 But what, when he comes back? The relics of a pie
 Lie crumbled on the floor, and Thomas squatting by!
 Beside the vinegar he sits,
 And purring, growling, pulls a fowl to bits.
 'Ho! ho! you glutton,' Cookie calls,
 'You roguel Your conscience should be pricking,
 To face an honest man, – to face the very walls!'
 (But Thomas all the while is busy with the chicken.)
 'What! you? – as good a cat as one could meet,
 For good behaviour once the model of the street,
 Oh Tom! How Tom has come to grief!
 And now they'll say from door to door
 That Tom's a cheat; that Tom's a thief:
 That Tom! – not only on the kitchen floor,
 You mustn't have him in the yard;
 Against a ravening wolf the fold is barred!
 That Tom's a curse, a blight! he's worse than a disease!'
 (Tom harks, and lunches at his ease.)

And still Cook's eloquence kept flowing like a river;
 It seemed the scolding would go on for ever;
 But ere the sermon was complete,
 The cat had polished off the meat.

And cooks there are to whom I'd say,
 'Write up upon your kitchen wall: –
 By Order: Waste no words at all,
 For cats aren't taught that way!'

LION AND GNAT



III. 9

BE gentle with the small,
 And think it shame to do the feeble wrong!
 The vengeance of the weak is very often strong.
 Then be not arrogant, nor think that strength is all.
 I have a tale that tells you that, –
 Of how the lion's pride was humbled by a gnat.
 Well, here, as I've been told, is how the story went.
 The lion with the gnat put on a cold contempt.
 The gnat was filled with rage; he could not stand the slight.
 The gnat he rose in arms and sallied forth to fight.
 He's knight and bugler, too; he trumps with all his breath,
 And challenges his foe to fight him to the death.

The lion laughs; but Gnat's not jesting.
 On back, or eyes, or ears, our trumpeter comes pesting;
 And picking out his spot, and waiting for his chance,
 With eagle's swoop he lunges,
 And in the back his sting he plunges.
 The lion quivers; at the foe his tail he flaunts.
 But nimble is our gnat; besides he knows no fear.
 Full on the forehead perched, he is sucking near the brain;
 The lion twists his head; the lion shakes his mane;

Our hero strikes and strikes again,
 Gets home upon the nose, or pricks behind the ear.

How Lion swore!
 How terrible his roar!
 He grinds his teeth with foaming jaws;
 He tears the earth up with his claws.
 The forest shakes all round, those awful tones to hear;
 The beasts are terror-struck; they hide, they fly in fear,
 The best foot first, and quick at that,
 As if the flood had come, or some great conflagration.
 And who? A gnat
 Has thrown them in this consternation.
 The lion's rage is spent; his frantic efforts cease;
 He falls upon the ground and sues the gnat for peace.
 The gnat has slaked his ire; his ardour he restrains.
 Achilles' part is played; 'tis Homer's now remains;
 His own,
 The trump that to the woods shall make his triumph known.

GARDENER AND WISEACRE III. 10

A GARDENER digged and digged with utmost zeal and care,
 As if he hoped to dig up treasure there;
 This was a man in love with labour,
 A sturdy fellow, fresh of face;
 For cucumbers alone, full fifty beds he'd trace.
 A chiel he had for next-door neighbour,
 One Perkins, who was sure that he knew everything,
 A talker by the yard, a self-styled friend of nature,
 A half-taught teacher
 Who only got from books ideas on gardening,
 Yet anxious to set out his cucumbers in line
 And sure he'd make his garden fine.
 He, with a chuckle, to his neighbour said:
 'My friend, you work quite hard, no doubt;
 But with this plan that I've drawn out,

You'll see how far I get ahead;
Compared with mine, you'll soon confess
Your garden is a wilderness.

Indeed, to tell the truth, I fail to understand
How you get anything from off that patch of land,
And why your crops still grow, I can't divine;
As far as I can see, you've never read a line!

'I've had no time,' his neighbour said;
'Hard work and practice, sticking to it,

That's all I've got, to do it;

With these, thank God, I get my bread.'

'You fancy you can rail at knowledge, stupid man!'

'Oh no, Sir! What I say, you shouldn't twist and turn.

Whenever you've a useful plan,

I'm always very glad to learn.'

'You wait till summer, then! You'll see what's worth the
showing.'

'But, Master, ain't it time to get the work a-going?

I put in some of mine a week ago;

As yet, you've not prepared one row.'

'I've not much time for that, just now;

I've got to read and ponder.

What's best, I wonder,

To dig the beds with spade, or turn them with a
plough?

Oh no! The time's not nearly gone.'

'May be, for you - for me it's getting on.'

With this, our gardener goes back to dig his land,

His spade in hand;

Our scholar to his study hies;

He reads, collates and verifies;

He digs in books, he digs in furrows,

Researches, ramifies and burrows.

He's hardly got his work in train,

And scarce a blade begins to taper –
 Some new invention in the paper!
 He'll have it up and start again;
 A fresh ideal! A brand-new plan!
 And what is the result, poor man!
 The gardener's crop comes up; he takes it in to town,
 And get's his profit, money down!
 But wise man Perkins
 Has got no gherkins!

THE PENITENT FOX

III. 11

'NOW tell me, worthy friend, you seem the very dickens
 For chickens,'
 Said peasant to a fox he met within the glade;
 'I'm really very sorry
 For yel'
 We're quite alone – let's call a spade a spade!
 To tell the honest truth, there isn't in your trade
 A scrap of good, that I perceive;
 But let alone the crime and shame it is to thief –
 And folks all curse you for a sinner, –
 A day can scarce begin, or
 You know you risk ere night, at supper or at dinner,
 To leave your bones beside your pickings.
 Now is that worth a thousand chickens?'
 'Worsel! It's a life that can't be stood!'
 'Tis so the Fox replies;
 'So vile all round, it makes my stomach rise;
 I hardly can digest my food;
 If you could only know, my heart's so good!
 No use! It's for my pups I'm feeling;
 Besides, as you're so kind, it comes into my mind,
 Am I the only one that makes his bread by stealing?

And yet, it cuts my heart that such a trade I ply.'

'Now try!'

The peasant answers him, 'If that's not all a lie,

I'll save you from a life of sin,

An honest livelihood to win;

You hire yourself to me! From foxes guard my chickens!

Who better than a fox can know a fox's trickings?

Yourself, you won't have one complaint to utter;
With me, you'll roll about as rolls a cheese in butter.'

The bargain's struck; the fox that day

Begins his duties straight away.

The peasant's way of life was comfortable, very;

The peasant was well off; and Fox could make quite merry.

This fox had plenty now to eat;

This fox himself was full of meat;

But still this fox remained a cheat!

Unstolen luxuries could never taste as sweet;

And thus good Comrade Fox his service crowned:

One night, when darkness was profound,

He took his comrade's chicks, and wrung their necks all
round!

Whom law and conscience hold in bounds,

That man you will not find deceiving

When even the sorest need surrounds;

But give a thief a million pounds,

'Tis vain to hope he'll cease from thieving.

YOUNG LION'S EDUCATION III. 12

God to the Lion gave the son for whom he pined.

With animals you have acquaintance, may be;

They're not at all like us! With us, a one-year baby

Is foolish, weak and small – both king's and common kind.

A year-old lion, as one knows,
 Has long since left his swaddling clothes.
 So at the year the king kept turning in his mind
 How best ensure, his son shall not remain a dullhead
 And keep the royal fame unsullied,
 That when the boy shall reign as he himself has done,
 His people may not blame the father for the son.
 Then whom is he to ask, or hire, or else compel
 To teach the lad to know his kingly duties well?
 Entrust him to the fox? The fox is clever,
 But then, he loves to lie like ever!
 To deal with liars, oh, the trouble that it brings;
 And that, the lion thought, is not an art for kings.
 Perhaps the mole? We're frequently assured
 What first-rate order in his house one finds;
 He never moves a step until the ground's explored,
 And every grain that's served upon his board
 Himself he cleans, himself he grinds;
 In short, report declares,
 The mole's a mighty beast for miniature affairs.
 But stay! Beneath his nose his eyes are sharp, 'tis said;
 But can he see a yard ahead?
 The moly's system's good, but not for you and me;
 And lion's realm is more than mole hill, you'll agree.
 Then why not try the pard? The pard is bold and
 strong;
 The pard can teach you tactics all day long.
 But politics – on that he's not so clear;
 Of civic rights he's not the least idea;
 What kind of lessons then, can Leopard give in ruling?
 A king must statesman be, and judge, and warrior too;
 And fighting's really all the pard can do!
 The children of the King are not for Leopard's school-
 ing.

In short, then, all the beasts and even the elephant,
 Who in the woods that name for wisdom held
 Which Plato bore of eld,
 All to the Lion seemed possessed of wits but scant
 And most profoundly ignorant.
 Well, luckily or not – at present you must guess,
 Acquainted with the King's distress,
 King Eagle,
 Who had always shown
 Great friendship for the neighbour throne,
 Resolved to do his friend a service truly regal,
 And asked himself to educate the boy.
 The Lion nearly jumped for joy;
 And was there better luck, before or since,
 Than this, to get a King as tutor for your prince?
 With outfit new Young Lion starts
 For foreign parts,
 In good King Eagle's school
 To learn to rule.
 A year, two years go by. From all that pass that way,
 There's not a word but praise: 'He's wiser every day';
 'No scholar learned so fast'; 'tis so the birds all say.
 At last the lad has served his final year;
 The Lion sends to fetch him here;
 The boy returns; the King bids all the beasts appear;
 When all have taken up their places,
 His child he kisses and embraces
 And thus addresses him: 'Beloved son,
 'Tis you must rule when I have done;
 I'm facing for the grave; your life has just begun.
 I'd gladly bid you reign instead of me;
 But tell us first, that all may hear and see,
 What various knowledge you have gained,
 And how your subjects' good, you think will be attained,'

'Papa,' replied the boy, 'I've studied, thanks to you,
 What none among you ever knew,
 And from the eagle to the quail,
 Where best each breed of bird you'll raise,
 Their favourite food, their various ways,
 The eggs that each one lays,
 And all that each requires – on not one point I'll fail.
 Please read what this certificate attests!
 'Tis not for nought the birds all cry,
 I'd fetch the starts from out the sky;
 Then, if 'tis your intent that I this realm should sway,
 I'll start and make my subjects straight away
 Build nests.'
 The Lion groaned, and all the beasts the same;
 The Council hung their heads for shame.
 Now, to the aged King, too late 'twas plain,
 The studies of his son were vain
 And scant the wisdom in his words,
 That small's the need to know the customs of the birds
 For him whom nature set the beasts to regulate,
 And this the highest lore that monarch can command,
 To understand
 Your native land
 And all that makes your country great.

THE OLD MAN AND THE THREE YOUNG DANDIES

III. 13

A GOOD old man came out to plant a tree.
 'Build,—one could understand; plant trees, that's far to reckon
 When Death has raised his hand to beckon!
 Thus, pertly laughing in his face,
 There argued three young men, the dandies of the place.

'The labours of your hands if you intend to see,

You'll have to last a century or two!

You seem to think you'll beat Methuselah!

Why don't you give it up, papa?

To work so far ahead, is scarce in place for you.

It's luck enough for you to live the next few hours.

Such plans excusable might be, if they were ours!

We're young and strong; for us life opens broad and brave;

But you, our poor old friend, have one foot in the grave!

'My friends,' the old man said, — his tones were meek and mild —

'I'm used to labour, from a child,

And if from this good work, which here I undertake,

The profit that I seek is not for self alone,

Why, then I own,

The pleasure of the task no whit the less will be.

A good man ought to work for others' sake;

And, when I plant this tree, I count among my pleasure,

That if I may not live, its spreading boughs to see,

My grandson in its shade may some day take his leisure,

And that's reward enough for me!

And can we, after all, forecast our destiny

Or say which life of ours shall longest be?

Do youth and strength from Death's grim favours save,

Or fairness of the face?

Alas, in my old age, sweet maidens full of grace

And fine and lusty youths I've followed to the grave.

Who knows? Your own last hour may be in view;

Perhaps the damp cold earth may open first for you.'

Now, as the old man spake, it did indeed betide.

For one, on ships at sea, his trade for profit plied;

At first with gleams of hope his venture fortune followed;

Then all around the tempest holloed;

Wrecked vessel and wrecked hopes the waste of waters
swallowed.

The second passed his time in some luxurious clime
 And there with every form of licence tampered,
 Till wanton, passionate and pampered,
 He squandered first his health, then life itself away.
 The third, who took an ice one very sultry day,
 Fell ill; his friends the case to clever doctors gave,
 Who doctored him in no time to his grave.
 And when he learned their history,
 Our good old man bewailed the fate of all the three.

THE SAPLING

III. 14

TOM with his axe was stepping through the wood;
 A sapling called to him, and stopped him on his way:
 'Do clear away those trees; kind friend, I wish you would!
 They will not let me have free play.
 On me the sunlight cannot fall;
 To spread my roots, I find no room at all;
 No whisper of the wind about me plays;
 They twine above my head a veritable maze.
 I tell you, but for them, if I could only start,
 You'd find me in a year the pride of all this part;
 The dell to right and left my friendly shade should cover;
 But as it is, you see! I'm brushwood – little over.'
 Then Tom, he swung his axe apace;
 His kindness did not waver
 To do a friend this favour,
 And round the little tree he cleared a tidy space.
 Poor Sapling! Not for long his triumph lasted;
 The heat came first, his sap to drain;
 Then he was lashed with hail and rain.
 And last a dreadful storm, which left him quite dismayed!
 'Oh foolish one,' hard by, he heard a serpent call:
 "Twas you that brought about your fall;

If longer in the wood's kind shelter you'd been reared,
Then neither heat nor wind your calm could so importune;
You had the elder trees for guardians of your fortune;
And if there came a time when all had disappeared
Because their day was past and gone,
In turn you might have reached such height, as years went on,
And so much health and strength have gathered,
That all this harm would never have been done,
And fiercer storms than this you might have safely
weathered.

GEESE

III. 15

IN long and trailing throng,
The rustic brought his geese to town, to sell;
Alas! the simple truth to tell,
'Twas not with much respect he jogged his herd along.
He feared it might be late to show them at the fair;
And when a man is bent on profit,
His friends, besides his geese, may sometimes have to
rough it.

Well, I myself won't blame him there.
The geese were not like me; a different view they took,
And meeting with a traveller on the way,
Their drover thus they brought to book:
'Were ever geese so plagued as we, alack-a-day?
We aren't allowed to walk in peace;
He jostles us along like any common geese.
The ignoramus doesn't seem to know,
He owes us great consideration;
For we our high descent from those same geese can show,
To whom the town of Rome stood debtor for salvation;
Why, there a special feast is honoured with their name.'
'But you,' the traveller asked, 'Have you a special claim?'

'Of course; our ancestors' – 'Yes, yes, I've read it too –
 I know all that; but tell me, do;
 What good from you yourselves has come?'
 'Why yes, our ancestors in Rome' –
 'But was there some one whom you did the same to?'
 'We've not done anything.' 'Then where's the good of you?'
 Do leave your ancestors alone!
 To them was due the honour shown;
 But apple sauce is all that you've a claim to.'

 'Twould not be hard to make my moral yet more clear,
 But that means vexing geese, I fear!

PIG

✓ III. 16

RIGHT into Squire's back-yard a pig his way had found,
 Looked in the scullery, the stables peered around,
 Then rolled about the muck and mire
 And wallowed in the slops to utmost pig's desire,
 No further cared to roam,
 Came piggy-pigging home.
 'Say, Piggy, what you've seen up yonder at the Hall?'
 Called Hodge upon the way;
 'The folks do say,
 It's rooms of beads and pearls and everything that's gay,
 Each finer than the last and full from wall to wall.'
 'Well, there! What stuff they talk,' said Swiny snorting
 hard,
 'As far as I could see, there's nothing fine at all;
 There's only rubbish and manure;
 And yet, I'm sure,
 I never spared my snout,
 And routed out
 The whole back-yard.'

Heaven knows I would not wound by any word of mine:
 But tell me, can you call by other name than swine,
 The critic who, whate'er he criticise,
 Can only see the bad, for nothing else has eyes.

THE FLY AND THE COACH III. 17

'Twas mid-day in July, as sultry as could be;
 And up a hillock deep with sand
 The squire and all his family
 A heavy four-in-hand
 Was dragging.
 The coachman, though he flogs his horses tired and flagging,
 At last must needs pull up. He scrambles to the ground.
 His beasts, mean persecutor,
 Assisted by the groom he worries round and round:
 No forward! From the coach crawl out upon the road
 Mr. and Mrs. Squire, their daughter, son and tutor.
 But still the carriage bears too full a load;
 And though the horses keep it moving still,
 'Tis all that they can do to scale the sandy hill.
 Just then a fly turns up. Our fly soon finds his feet;
 He's come to help distress; he buzzes and he buzzes,
 And all around the carriage fusses;
 He lunges sidelong in, the right-hand horse to bother,
 He pricks the forehead of another,
 Then lights upon the box and takes the driver's seat,
 Or gives the team a truce,
 To urge the passengers to make themselves of use.
 He bustles in and out, like buyer at a fair,
 And vows he cannot understand,
 Why no one lends a hand,
 And no one seems to care.

The servants trail behind, and drone about the weather;
 The tutor and Miss Rose in whispers talk together;
 And Master is not there to lead them as he should, –
 The maid and he are gone for mushrooms to the wood.
 The fly complains to all, that he and he alone

Is doing all the work that's done.

With painful steps, meanwhile, our horses drag their load
 Till, bit by bit, they reach the level road.

'Well, there!' the fly exclaims, 'And now at last thank
 God!

Well! Take your places, all! A journey of the best!

But now, for sake of heaven, let's rest!

A minute more, and I should fall!

And how we wish those idiots were more rare,
 Who feel that they must poke their noses everywhere
 And press their useless help, where no one asks at all!

EAGLE AND SPIDER

III. 18

AN eagle to the clearer air

Of topmost Caucasus did rise,

Perched on a time-worn cedar there,

And feasted on the view that stretched beneath his eyes!

From thence he seemed to see the edge of all the world;

Out yonder through the steppes the winding rivers curled,

And nearer, wood and pasture wide,

Dressed out in all the charms of spring;

And further still, the angry Caspian's tide

Black on the skyline lay, like some great raven's wing.

'All hail, O Zeus, to thee, that ruling earth and heaven,

Of thine all-wisdom, thou to me such strength hast given,

That I have seen no height my wings could not essay,'
 To Zeus the grateful eagle said,
 'And all the beauties of the world survey,
 From where no eagle's wing was spread.'
 'Good heavens! Was such a braggart ever known?'
 Thus answered from a twig a spider overhead.
 'Why, comrade! Here I sit, no lower, you must own.'
 The eagle looks that way. Up there, the spider
 His silken net spreads ever wide and wider,
 And hops and skips about,
 And spins as if to block the eagle's sunlight out.
 'But you – how came you here so high?'
 The eagle asked, 'Even they
 Who climb on fearless wings the closest to the sky,
 Not all will dare to come this way.
 You're weak; you have no wings. You surely did not
 crawl?'

'Oh that I would not dare to do!'
 'Then tell me how you came at all!'
 'You see, I fastened on to you!
 You brought me here yourself! I sat upon your tail.
 But now, without your help, you see that I can stay;
 So when you speak to me, be much more modest, pray!
 Be sure that I –' But here, a swift and sudden gale
 Blew off our boastful friend far yonder down the vale.

And what a strong resemblance – don't you find –
 Those other insects have to spiders of this kind,
 Who short of industry and still more short of mind,
 In some great noble's track come trailing up behind!
 Their chests as tight they puff,
 As though with eagle's strength 'twere given them to excell
 And yet, a sniff of wind's enough
 To sweep them down with web as well.

THE DOE AND THE DERVISH III. 19

A FAIR young mother Doe, whose pretty fawns had died,
 As still her teats with mother's milk were swelled,
 For two small wolfling cubs whom in the wood she spied
 Discharged the sacred debt, by mother's love impelled,
 And gave her little foundlings food.
 A Dervish living in that wood,
 With sheer astonishment her deed beheld,
 'Unreasoning! On whom hast turned thy love?' he said.
 'Dost spend thy treasure on these urchins rude?
 Or can it be from these thou look'st for gratitude?
 Perhaps – or know'st thou not the malice of their brood? –
 'Tis thine own blood that they will shed.'
 'Who knows? Perhaps it may be so;
 Of that I never thought,' replied the Doe,
 'And do not ever care to think.
 The mother's impulse makes my only happiness.
 The milk I have in me, would keep me in distress
 Unless I gave these cubs to drink.'

All generous natures yearn
 To do some good without return,
 And affluence seems hard to bear,
 Unless with those who lack they share.

PUPPY

III. 20

THERE was a pup, which never would behave.
 His master was so kind, he'd nothing left to crave;
 Another dog, so well supplied,
 Would surely have been satisfied,

'For safe abode,' he said, 'this oak will never do;
 The roots are nearly rotted through,
 And any time the tree may fall;
 'Twere better not to sojourn here at all.'
 Well really! From a mole have eagles need of learning,
 A mole inside a hole! Does he deny,
 The eagle eye
 Is so discerning?
 And who's the mole that dares
 To mix in the affairs
 Of Kings?

So to this mole he had not much to say;
 He scorned such councillor, got working straight away,
 Moved in his family that day!
 'Twas time his Lady Queen should end her wanderings;
 It all went right; the chicks were charming little things.
 But when, one day, at rise of sun,
 From close against the sky, his questing done,
 The eagle sailed for home with rich repast for all,
 He saw his oak lay shattered! In its fall
 His eagle spouse, his chicks, had perished every one.
 Oh! bitter, bitter was his pain;
 'Unhappy me!' he cried:

'How cruel is the blow that fate has dealt my pride,
 Because the best advice passed by me all in vain.

But was it strange, I never knew
 A warning from a mole would prove to be so true?'

'Because you felt contempt for me,
 You did not stop to think,' replied the humble mole,
 'That in the earth I make my hole,
 And thus so near the roots must be,
 That none can better know what health is in the tree.'

Book IV

THE tricksome little monkey,
 The goat with tangled hair,
 The donkey
 And the clumsy-fingered bear

A great quartett had planned to start;
 They got the notes, viola, fiddles, bass,
 And sat beneath a lime-tree, on the grass,
 To charm creation with their art.

They struck the sounding strings; what discord, oh my heart!

‘Stop, boys,’ cries little monkey, ‘wait a bit;

It can’t go right like that; you don’t know how to sit!

You face viola, bear, with your bassoon;
 First fiddle faces second; then, you’ll see,

We’ll play to quite another tune
 And make the hills and forest dance for glee.’

They change their places, start again;

Yet all attempts at tune are vain.

‘Here, stop!’ says donkey, ‘I’ll explain!

I’m sure we’ll make it go

By sitting in a row.’

The donkey’s plan they tried,

Of sitting side by side;

But did it answer? No.

Why, only all the worse they got entangled,

And all the more they wrangled,

On where to sit and why.

Attracted by the noise, a nightingale came by.

To him they all appeal to show them, what’s the way;

‘Have patience with us, please,’ they say,

‘We’re trying a quartett, which will not go a bit;

We’ve notes, we’ve instruments; do tell us how to sit!’

‘To manage a quartett, you must know how to play,’

The nightingale replies: 'To sit, is not enough.
 Besides, my friends, your ears are much too rough.
 Then change your seats, and fiddles too:
 Yet chamber music's not for you!'

LEAVES AND ROOTS

IV. 2

ONE splendid summer day –
 The dell below in shadow lay –
 The leaves upon a tree half murmured to the breeze,
 Boasting their clusters thick, the freshness of their hue;
 Their whispers to the wind were full of words like these:
 'Who'll find in all the dell so fair a sight to view?
 His full and rounded lines 'tis we that give the tree,
 His widespread form and majesty;
 Now say, without us, what were he?
 Then is it sin for us, our praises to repeat?
 'Tis we the swain from noon-day heat,
 'Tis we the wayfarer in our cool shadow screen.
 'Tis our delights that call away
 The village girls, to dance upon the green;
 'Tis here at sunrise and at sunset, every day,
 The nightingale strikes up his lay;
 And, Zephyrs, say!
 What love you better than with us to play?'
 'You might find time to add to us a thank-you, too,'
 A voice beneath the earth made answer low and humble.
 'Who has the arrogance to raise this barefaced grumble?
 Pray, tell us: Who are you,
 That this pretentious claim to match with us, have uttered?'
 The quivering leaves about the branches fluttered.
 'Why, we are they,
 Who digging deep beneath the light of day,

Keep you alive – or do the leaves not know? –
The roots of that same tree on which yourselves you grow.

Then flaunt, the summer through;
And yet this difference between us, keep in view!
When spring returns again, new leaves wave hither, thither,
But if but once the roots should wither,
The tree is gone, and so are you.'

WOLF AND FOX ✓

IV. 3

WE are very generous
With things that are no use to us!
I think I'll put it in a fable;
For truth, when half disguised, is much more palatable.

When Master Fox of food had had his fill one day
And quite a tidy store had neatly stowed away,
He took an evening nap beneath a stack of hay.
He turns – with dragging steps a hungry Wolf comes
snuffing.

'Well, there!' says Wolf, 'was ever such a plight?
I can't even find a bone – let pass the meat and stuffing!
I see I'm doomed to starve outright;
A watchful shepherd! Dogs that bite!
I'd hang myself for nothing!'
'No really?' 'Honour bright!' 'Poor friend, what could be
harder!

But won't you have some hay? I've all this stack on hand;
And I'm my comrade's to command.'

Wolf's cold about the hay; though meat would raise his
ardour,

There's ne'er a word of Fox's larder!

And so my old grey knight,
Though Fox is fearfully polite,
Goes supperless to bed that night.

A KITE

IV. 4

EVER so high,
Right up against the sky,
A paper kite looked down and spied a butterfly;
'Would you believe?' he calls. 'My eye can hardly track you!
What pains of jealousy must rack you
To see me sailing through the skies above you!'
'What? Jealousy? Lord love you!
I think, about yourself you've got a wrong idea.
Although you ride up there, 'tis on a string you fly.
A life like yours, my dear,
Is far removed from happiness!
My flights are modest, I confess:
But still, 'tis I
Who settle where I fly!
Besides, to help the time to pass
For some one else – some ass,
I'm not compelled to make myself a guy.'

SWAN, PIKE AND CRAB

IV. 5

WHEN partners can't agree,
Their business fares disastrously;
With worry all the while, they get no further on.
One day, the pike, the crab, the swan
Set out to drag a trolley down the road,
All three together harnessed to the load.

First he squeaked, then cleared his throat,
Then bleated like a goat,
And then the Lord knows how,
Threw in a kitten's miaow: —
In short, the birds all round went flying off pell-mell!
My starling,
Little darling,
Your song has ended sadly;
You'd better do the goldfinch well,
Than nightingale so badly.

POND AND RIVER

IV. 7

‘How’s this?’ Of some great stream a neighbouring pond
inquired;

'Whene'er I glance your way,
 I see you running on all day;
 Indeed, my sister dear, you must be rather tired!
 Besides, whene'er your course I contemplate,
 Now massive ships with ponderous freight,
 Now tedious trains of rafts go past before me.
 I do not talk about the boats and the canoes;
 They're endless. When will you so dull a life refuse?
 I'd dry clean up – so much 'twould bore me!
 Ah, such a peaceful life as mine is, can you show me?
 I grant 'tis few who know me;
 Across a page of map I do not scrawl my name;
 No strummer with guitar sits twanging out my fame!
 But do such pleasures really please?
 'Twixt soft and miry banks, a happy loafer,
 Like some great lady, propped in cushions on her sofa,
 I loll in luxury and ease.

Let be a ship or boat,
Or logs afloat,

There's nothing here to make ado;
I've never even felt the weight of a canoe!
'Tis much if some stray leaf scarce quivers on my breast,
Brought by a puff of air with me to rest.

Fenced off from every wind, secured from every worry,
No lot as good as mine, say I!
At rest, while all around life runs its ceaseless hurry,
In philosophic dream I lie.'

'Philosopher, you won't forget,
As you're so knowing,

This law - ' the river made reply,
'That water only keeps its freshness while it's flowing.
And if I am become a great and mighty stream,
Why then, it is because, not lying there to dream,
I follow in the law laid down.

So comes it, year by year,
My wealth of waters, bountiful and clear,
Brings blessings to the world, wins honour and renown;
And I, perhaps, shall still have centuries to flow,
When even your very name there's none will know!
The words he spake came true; still flows that stately
river,

But Pond grew shallower as years went on;
A mask of slime spread all across his face;
The weeds sprang up and grew apace,
Till in the end, the pond was gone.

So gifts unused must fail, with none to rue,
And die in slow decay,
Where sloth has fixed its fatal sway
And work, hard work, has ceased their vigour to renew.

SAM found his coat at the elbows worn clean through;
 'Well, that won't take me long. Some thread, a needle, pray!'
 He cut a quarter of the sleeve away,
 And patched the elbows up. The coat was good as new.
 Only the arms were shortened by a quarter;
 Well, well, and why not wear them shorter?
 But look! The people in the streets were laughing;
 'Well, I'm no fool,' says Sam, 'I'll quickly stop their chaffing.
 The arms I can restore!
 Why, bless you! I'll have sleeves much longer than before.'
 He cuts the flaps off there and trims them here,
 And puts the sleeves to rights; and Sam's a merry clown,
 Though now he wears a coat so queer,
 That most men's waistcoats reach much further down.

It's not the only case there's been.
 Some gentlemen I've seen,
 First muddling their affairs, and then repairing –
 Just look! Now aren't they fine? It's Sammy's coat they're
 wearing.

THE ENGINEER

IV. 9

SOME fine young fellow bought a house and an estate,
 An old ancestral home, but fully up to date.
 'Twas all a man could want, so cosy and so strong,
 In every way the manor was a dream,
 And only one thing wrong –
 It happened that it stood some distance from a stream.
 'Well, what of that,' thinks he. 'You suit yourself, you
 know!
 The house itself can go

By traction to the stream, with just a bit of steering;
 (You see, this fine young man was keen on engineering)

I've just to put a sledge below;

As soon as underneath I've filed the whole foundation,

I'll put the house on runners, as it stands,

And then, at will I'll choose my situation,

As if I turned it in my hands.

And then, another thing the world has never seen, -

The day my house shall take this enterprising ride,

We'll get the local band, we'll mount my friends inside,

A splendid feast for all provide,

To my own house-warming I'll drive my own machine.'

In love with this insane idea,

He gets to work at once, our dashing engineer.

He hires a gang of men and digs at the foundations,

He never spares his cash, nor yet his lucubrations,

But get the house to move - that beats his calculations;

There's one result, his work to crown -

It all comes tumbling down.

And are there few of us

That fuss

For objects more absurd and far more dangerous?

FIRE AND DIAMOND

IV. 10

A TINY spark became a blaze;

The fire, with furious power,

Swept curling round the roofs at midnight's silent hour.

Amidst the uproar and amaze,

Was lost a diamond,

Which lying in the dust, scarce twinkled on the ground.

'Why, you, with all your puny sparkling,
Compared with me,' said Fire, 'are dull and darkling.

Why, think! It needs a practised eye's assistance,
If we distinguish you, at even the shortest distance,
From any water-drop or bit of broken glass,
That is, if ray of sun or mine should sparkle there.
I hardly need to add, that scarce a breath can pass
Without the risk that it will drive you to despair:

A trifle, just a piece of rag

Can dim you! Even a single hair,
If twined about your girth, can make your brilliance
flag.

'Tis not so easy to obscure my glory,

When in the fury of my wrath

I grip the topmost storey.

See! See! Let hosts of men be on my path,

I scorn and scout their puny power,

And all I meet I crackle and devour;

See how my lurid glare, that dances on the sky,

Brings terror to the dwellers nigh.'

'Though, matched with you, 'tis faintly that I shine,'

The gem makes answer, 'I am not malign;

Of victims wronged by me, no tongue has aught to say;

Who chides my peaceful ray?

The jealous – none but they.

But you – you cannot shine but by destroying;

And so, their utmost strength employing,

You see, how all join in, your flames to overbear.

May be, the fiercer that you flare,

The sooner will your strength be spent.'

And look! To quench the fire, come folk of every kind;

By morning, smoke and stench is all that's left behind;

And soon the diamond they find;

It shines in monarch's crown, his fairest ornament.

THOUGH help in time of need is precious, as we know,
Not every one such timely help can lend;
Heaven save you from a foolish friend;
The too officious fool is worse than any foe.

There lived a lonely man, with none to call his own,
Far from the town in forest wild;
Though tales of hermit life our fancy have beguiled,
He's not a common man, who's fit to live alone.
Oh sweet, in joy and grief, is human sympathy!
Ah! but thro' pleasant meads and leafy groves to pass,
To cross the knolls and streams, to lie on silky grass!
Delightfull There I must agree;
And yet, it's rather dull, with none these joys to share.
Our hermit, too, had soon to own,
It was not gay to live alone.
Some forest glade he'd walk to,
And find a soul to talk to,
And to his neighbours so get known.
But who goes strolling there,
Except perhaps, a wolf or bear?
Indeed, a few yards off, a burly bear he saw,
He doffed his hat – he had to do it now! –
And made his nice new friend a courtly bow;
His nice new friend puts out a furry paw,
They start a little chat, and talk about the weather.
They soon get on so well,
Each finds the other indispensable
And so they pass whole days together.
Of what and how these friends discoursed alone,
The jokes they had, the tricks they played in sport,
How each was entertained, in short,

I to this day have never known.
 The hermit was reserved and stern
 And Mike¹ by nature taciturn,
 And so no rubbish out of doors was thrown.
 However that may be, great was the hermit's pleasure
 To find his comrade such a treasure;
 He followed Mike all day, and moped without his friend;
 In Micky's praise he'd talk for hours on end.
 Once on a brilliant summer day
 They made a little plan, through woods and meads to stray
 And o'er the hills and far away.
 But as with strength of bear no man can quite compete,
 Our hermit, in the noon-day heat,
 Got tired, and Mike looked round to find
 His friend was far behind;
 So, full of kindly thought, he stopped and gave a call;
 'Lie down and have a rest, old chap,
 And if you like, why take a nap,
 And I'll sit by and watch, lest any harm befall.'
 The hermit felt inclined, lay down, and yawning deep
 Was quickly fast asleep;
 So Mike is on the watch, as very soon he shows.
 A fly is on the hermit's nose;
 He waves the fly away;
 Nay, nay!
 It lights upon the cheek. 'Be off, you wretch!' Absurd!
 It's on the nose again,
 And ever more persistent to remain.
 Now look at Mikel He doesn't speak a word,
 But gathers up a stone of ponderous weight,
 Squats on his hinder paws,
 And scarce a breath he draws;

¹ The bear's name in Russia.

‘Hush, hush! You lively brute,’ thinks he, ‘I’ll have you
now,’

And waiting till it lights above the hermit’s brow,
Smash, crash, he thumps the stone full on the sleeper’s pate;
The blow came home so true, it split the skull in twain;
And Master Micky’s friend will not get up again.

THE FLOWERS

IV. 12

INSIDE a sumptuous room, with windows opened wide,
In china vases, bright with colours rare,
Some artificial flowers, with living flowers beside,
On stalks of wire, in all their pride
Were swaying in the morning air,
And showed their flaunting charms to all that loitered there.

All sudden patters down the rain;
The flowers of calico to Jupiter complain:

Oh! Can’t he stop the shower?

Abuse, entreaties rise from every painted flower;

‘Oh, Jupiter! The rain! The rain!’ they call.

‘It does no good at all!

The rain is nothing but a curse;

You see, the streets are getting worse and worse;
The world’s all pools and mud, when rain begins to fall.’
But Jove their foolish prayer to grant did not think meet;
Its full appointed task he let the rain complete.

So passed the heat;

And now the air is cool, and nature breathes once more,

And leaves and grass seem greener than before;

Now on the window-sill the pretty flowers that grow,

In all their native charm expand again,

And, smelling sweeter for the rain,

More fresh, more downy show;
 But those poor flowers of calico
 Have lost their colours bright and gay,
 And with the rubbish of the day
 Are swept away.

All talent real and true detraction can disdain;
 Its native excellence defies the critic's power;
 'Tis but the artificial flower
 That fears the rain.

THE PEASANT AND THE SNAKE

IV. 13

A SNAKE to a peasant's house crawled in and asked to stay:
 Not just to live there as a guest;
 Oh no! She wants to nurse the children, if she may:
 The bread one earns will taste the best.
 'I know the unfavourable view,' says she,
 'That every human person takes
 About us snakes.
 We're all as wicked as can be.
 It's always been the thing to say,
 That snakes possess no sense of gratitude,
 That thought for friend or kin, their feelings does not sway,
 And even that they use their little ones as food.
 Suppose that that's all true, I'm just the other way,
 I never bit a soul my whole life long,
 And so detest what's wrong –
 I'd let them take my sting and make no bones about it,
 If I could live without it –
 Only I doubt it!

In fact you'll never see

A snake like me;

Think, with your little ones how tender I shall be!

'Suppose,' the peasant says, 'that's true and I believe you,

Yet all the same I can't receive you.

If once my neighbours hear

What good you do,

After the virtuous snake – that's you! –

A hundred bad ones will come crawling too,

And soon they'll do for all the children here.

I'll tell you too, my friend, to spare mistakes,

Another reason why we shan't get on:

I've got a prejudice that even the best of snakes

Is never half so good as none.'

PEASANT AND ROBBER

IV. 14

A PEASANT from the fair had come;

A cow and milking-pail he'd purchased for his house,

And now beneath the spreading boughs

By country tracks and paths he slowly ambled home.

But see! A robber bars the road,

And soon our peasant he relieves of every load.

'Oh dear!' The rustic moans: 'Oh dear! I'm ruined now.

I've nothing left. You've stripped me bare!

For years and years I've saved to buy this little cow,

Through all my struggles, hoping for this day.'

'Well, well! I can't abide to hear you wail,'

That robber kind made haste to say;

And milking, after all, is hardly my affair;

So there!

I give you back your milking-pail.'

THE SIGHTSEER

IV. 15

‘AH! glad to see you, Brown! Well, tell me where you’ve been?’

‘The new Museum, White,
To spend an hour or two;
I’ve gone right through and through:
It’s simply a delight!

My tongue, my memory would fail me quite
To tell you all the things I’ve seen.

Yes, there are wonders by the room-full, there.

What wealth of quaint designs has nature got to spare –

Such beasts! Such birds! You never saw the sight:

Those butterflies! Those insects small!

Fly, beetle, centipede, and all!

And some like emeralds, and some like corals bright!

And then, the tiny lady-bird!

Why, scarce a pin’s-head! You will hardly take my word.’

‘You saw the elephant? A sight you won’t forget!

I guess you thought a mountain you had met.

So huge he is, and large of limb.’

‘What! Is he there?’ ‘Of course!’ ‘Well – no, to my regret!

The elephant? I never noticed him.’

THE LION A-HUNTING

IV. 16

ONCE Dog and Lion, Wolf and Fox,
Kept house in common in the wood;

And here’s the deed,

Which they agreed

To hold and keep as partners should:

In hunting to remain allied,
And everything they catch in equal shares divide.

To start with – how or where I cannot say,

The fox had caught a deer one day,
And to his partners sent with all dispatch,
To come and share the lucky catch.

A prey to make you lick your jaws!
They came, the lion came; he, getting out his claws,
Looks in the face his partners on all sides,

The booty then divides.

‘My boys,’ says he, ‘we cut in four: that’s clear!’
And into portions four he then divides the deer.
‘Well, now we’ll take our shares. Now look, my friends!
You see?’

This portion falls to me
By act and deed.

And this belongs to me as lion – that’s agreed.
And this is mine, because I’m stronger than you three.
And as for this, the beast that puts a paw that way,
He won’t go home alive to-day.

HORSE AND RIDER

IV. 17

A RIDER put his horse through such a thorough school,
That he could do with it, what came into his head;
A shake of the reins, no more, this horse would
rule,

It understood each word he said.

‘On such a horse to put the curb is idle!’

By word alone he thought he’d steer;

He fell in love with this idea,

And, riding out one day, he took away the bridle.

And now the rein's away,
At first our steed moves quicker o'er the plain,
Though slightly,
And throwing back his head and shaking out his mane,
He prances with a step so sprightly -
As if to make his master gay;
But when he understands there's none too tight a hold,
Our mettled steed makes much more bold.
His eyes are now aflame, his blood has fired his brain,
No more he hears the chidings of his master,
Still faster sweeps him on and faster,
Across the boundless plain.
In vain the unhappy man, now losing all command,
With clumsy, trembling hand,
To put the bridle back was trying;
The horse, completely out of hand,
Went racing, tearing on, and plunged, and sent him
flying.
Still, like a whirlwind, on he flew,
Saw nothing, no direction knew,
Till down a steep ravine in furious course he rushed
And there was crushed.
Ah! Rider, Rider, see and rue!
'My poor, good horse,' he cried, 'tis I have caused
Your sad disaster.
If ere I slipped the bridle, I had paused,
I know you would have hearkened to your master,
And never thrown me off, my friend,
And never come yourself to such a piteous end.'

Let freedom's charms be ne'er so fair,
For peoples yet
There's no less harm and danger there,
Where no wise limit has been set.

ONE day some peasants out of patience
 At devastations
 Which little brooks and streams in flood
 Caused on their wild presumptuous road,
 Decided to entreat to make their grievance good
 The river into which those streams and torrents flowed;
 Good reason for complaint, you'd say:
 Crops devastated,
 And mills torn up and washed away,
 And cattle drowned that can't be calculated.
 That river flowed so calm and stately in its bed;
 Great towns stood all secure upon its banks,
 And folks would laugh if anyone had said
 That it could play such pranks.
 No doubt their wrong will be redressed:
 'Twas so the simple peasants reckoned;
 But as they neared its banks, the one in front just beckoned;
 The others looked for half a second:
 The half of what they'd lost was floating on its breast.
 So to complain
 They did not waste their labour;
 But, gazing on the stream instead,
 Then glancing at his neighbour,
 Each shook his head
 And faced for home again!
 And as they went, they said:
 'It's no use wasting trouble there;
 To win your suit against the small, despair,
 When all their plunder with the great they share!'

ONE day, a careless shot brought down a robin.
 If all the harm had stopped at that! But it did not;
 Alas! the fatal blow set three small hearts a-throbbing;
 Her three poor helpless chicks were widowed by that shot.
 These chicks have just been hatched; small wit, small
 strength they've got.

They miss their supper-giver;

With cold they shiver;

They call their mother back with plaintive little squeaks.

'Who would not be distressed

These piteous babes to see?

Whose heart will not grow warm with sympathy?'

So to the birds Dame Foxy speaks,

Half squatting on a stone just underneath their nest:

'Kind friends, you won't desert these children in their need.

Let each for these poor chicks to bring some offering strive!

Let each into their nest his wisp of straw contrive!

By this you'll keep these babes alive.

What's better than a kindly deed?

Come, cuckoo, use your wits! You're moulting, it is plain.

Now isn't it more use to pluck yourself instead,

And with your feathers make a downy little bed?

You'll lose them anyhow, to no one's gain.

You, lark - enough of taking headers,

And doing circles in the air!

You should be seeking food about the fields and meadows,

To give these orphaned babes a share.

You, wood-pigeon - your chicks by now their wings have
 spread,

I'm sure they're old enough to earn their daily bread;

Why can't you quit your nest on yonder tree?

To these poor chicks a mother you could be;

Of your small pigeons over there

Let God take care!

You, swallow, catch some flies to eat!

Poor orphaned mites, they need a treat!

And you, my nice, kind nightingale,

You know how all delight when you are nigh;

While zephyrs gently sway their little nest so frail,

Do send them off to sleep with your sweet lullaby!

Such care and tenderness, I feel assured,

Might make them even forget the loss they have endured.

Do what I ask! Let's show what kindly hearts there are

Even in the wilds. Let's show -' She'd hardly got so far,

When all those tiny robins three

Could hold no more, for hunger, to the tree,

Came tumbling down at Fox's side.

And Fox - she dropped her sentiments so fine,

And sat straight down to dine.

My friends, you're mortified?

A man who's really kind, no time in speeches lost,

In silence does his kindly deeds.

Who pours his sentiments in any ear that heeds,

Is only kind at others' cost,

And quick enough to see, no wish of his is crossed;

And ask such men for deeds - I've seen the same with
dozens -

My Fox and they are cousins.

BEASTS IN COUNCIL

IV. 20

WHATEVER rules you may devise,

Once put them in the hands of men that have no conscience,

The part which most to them applies

They're sure to find some trick for turning into nonsense.

Wolf asked King Lion for the charge of all the sheep.

By Fox's friendship and address,

A word was spoken to the Lioness,

But, as the wolf's good name is doubtful, more or less,
That no one should complain court favour went too cheap,

They planned that subjects 'neath the Lion's sway
Should duly meet one day,

When all and sundry they would ask

In what the wolf they'd praise, in what would take to task.

They summon all the beasts, the question is preferred,

And each, by rank, is asked, till every voice is heard;

Against the wolf there's not a word;

So Wolf is put in charge of all the sheep dominion.

But what were all the sheep about?

For lots of sheep were summoned too, no doubt.

Well, no: they quite forgot, and left them out: -

The very first to ask for their opinion!

Book V

'Now do, old fellow, do!

This dish was specially for you.'

'No, my dear fellow, no: I'm simply stuffed.' 'No matter!

There's room for just one little platter.

By Gum, on soup like this, it's just a joy to sup!

'I've had three helpings now.' 'What, counting every
bite?

Why, where's your appetite?

'Twill do you good; so eat it up!

So rich and thick, upon my soul,

It curdles and it strains like amber in the bowl.

Now do, old friend! Just help me out!

Here's perch, and here's some tripe, and here's a piece of
trout.

Just half a helping, do!

You ask him, wife; perhaps he will for you.'

'Twas thus that Master John did Master Tom entreat,

Nor rest, nor respite gave, still urging him to eat.

You see from Thomas' face the perspiration pour;

Perspire or not perspire, he takes one helping more,

Contrives distaste to smother,

And clears the platter dry. 'Tis you're the lad for me;

With all your squeamish gents I never could agree.

Well done!' cries Master John. 'And now you'll have
another!'

But here, in sheer dismay,

Though fond enough of soup, old Tom gets up straight-
way;

Hat, belt and stick

He gathers quick

And runs for home with might and main,

And Master John won't see that friend again.

My author, well for you to own a talent rare;
 But if you will not learn in season to forbear
 And so your neighbour's ears too seldom spare, –
 Be sure your prose and verse, as you go on and on,
 Will sicken people more than soup of Master John.

MOUSE AND RAT

V. 2

'Oh dear, such happy news: you've heard what people say?'
 The mouse ran in to tell the rat;
 'The lion, you must know, has gone and caught the cat,
 So now we all can run about and play.'
 'My dear,' replies the rat,
 'You needn't be so pleased at that;
 Have no illusions any longer!
 For if the two have come to strife,
 The lion surely lost his life;
 Than that old cat there's no one stronger.'

How oft I've seen beneath the sun: –
 If some one frightens you,
 Straight off you fancy, every one
 Must fear your bogie too.

BULLFINCH AND PIGEON

V. 3

A BULLFINCH once got caught – he stepped inside a cage;
 Against the bars poor Bully dashed and fought.
 A pert young pigeon near kept chuckling at the thought.
 'What, in broad daylight! Fancy, at your age,
 That you get caught!

They don't catch me, though, I engage!
 They'll find that I am far too bright!
 Just then a common snare his little leg entraps.

And serve him right!
 In future, pigeon dear, don't laugh at folks' mishaps!

THE PEARL DIVERS

V. 4

A KING fell deep in doubt; the question he was turning,
 Was this: From making books does harm or profit flow?
 Or do not heart and hand the weaker grow
 From learning?

Perhaps 'twere best to let the learned go
 And leave within his realm the stupid folk alone:
 But as this noble king, a glory to his throne,
 Was always diligent to work his people's bliss,
 And for that cause

Would never make new laws,
 Through simple whim or prejudice,
 He called a solemn parliament
 Where each should say his word, that common sense might
 show,

In simple speech with plain intent,
 The which were wiser, ay or no;
 That is: - Shall learned men be driven from this shore
 Or may they in the realm remain as heretofore?

Yet though the members talked and talked all day,
 And each one wished to have his say,
 Or read, at least, a speech concocted by his clerk,
 They never cleared his doubts away,
 And only left the king's confusion still more dark.
 One said that ignorance was night,
 That God, who gave us reason's light

And made us know the mysteries of heaven,
 Had surely never meant
 That men should be no more intelligent
 Than beasts to whom no mind is given;
 And if God's purpose was to bless,
 Then learning leads to human happiness.

But others next assert
 That man from sciences has nothing gained, but hurt:
 Learning is rubbish, sir;
 It only spoils the character;
 And where instruction makes its way,
 The greatest State has seen its day.
 Can these two views agree? Why, never!
 Some talk good sense, and others vapour;
 But though they cover reams of paper,
 The battle of the books is still as fierce as ever!
 The king did more; he chose the few that seemed most
 clever

And out of these alone a standing council made
 To clear the question up – does learning harm or bless?

But here again without success;
 These members, you must know, were paid, and highly
 paid.

For members highly paid, to disagree
 A constant source of gain will be;
 So had these members had free play,
 They'd still be talking there to-day
 And likewise drawing pay!

But as this king knew something of finance,
 He saw it at a glance
 And sent them all away.

Meanwhile, from hour to hour, still deeper grew his
 doubt.
 Once walking in the fields he tries to think it out,

When see, before him stands
 A greybeard come from foreign lands,
 A ponderous volume in his hands;
 The greybeard was a man of grave but cheerful mien,
 A kindly smile with native grace
 Lit up his venerable face,
 And on his furrowed brow deep marks of thought were
seen.

So, with this reverend seer the brooding king conversed
 And, finding him adept in truths not understood,
 He begged him solve the doubt in which he was immersed:

Does learning do more harm than good?

‘Oh King,’ the sage replies, ‘give leave that I unveil

My finding in a simple tale,

Which years of thinking taught as only thinking could.’

He gathered up his thoughts, and thus began:

‘In India, by the sea,

There lived a fisherman;

Full many a year he toiled in want and poverty,

Then died, and in his place left three young sons behind;

These sons, surmising

Small treasure in their father’s nets to find,

Nay more, his homely art despising,

Would search the sea for yield of quite a different kind,

Not fish but pearls! – By pearls their fortune should be
madel

So as they all could swim and dive,

They planned at once to live

By this new trade.

But not the same success did all three brothers meet;

For one, a sluggard, evermore

The barren beach kept roaming o’er;

He even would not deign to wet his precious feet

And, save for what the waves threw up on shore,

His head would not consent to bother;
 So this, the lazy brother
 Could scarcely earn enough to eat.

Another

From one spot to the next one rowing,
 No trouble and no toil forgoing,
 Where labour was not spent in vain,
 Full many a precious pearl by diving did attain,
 His fortune hourly growing.

The third, with longing seized for opulence unknown,
 Thus reasoned with himself alone:

Though pearls I well may find along the shore,
 Yet think what riches lie for me in store;
 'Twere shame, methinks, to fear to go afield for more;
 If only I for once could be

Right at the very bottom of the sea!
 There, mountains I might find of wealth beyond all measure
 And every kind of treasure,

Coral and pearl and precious stones untold,
 Which he who finds may turn to gold.

So this poor fool, entranced with fancies vain,
 Put out into the open main,
 And choosing out a spot of murkiness profound,
 Sprang down into the deep, but whelmed those depths
beneath,

Or ever he the abyss could sound,
 The price of folly paid with death.

Sire,' quoth the sage, 'tis ever so;
 Though learning brings to man much good of every
kind,

A bottomless abyss rash wits therein may find,
 And thus to final ruin go;

Nor that alone they do:—
 They often drag their friends to ruin too.'

MISTRESS AND HER TWO MAIDS V. 5

A STERN old lady, terribly punctilious,
 Inexorable, sharp and bilious,
 Had two young servant maids, whose daily task it was
 From early morning on till late at night,
 To sew and sew without a pause.
 Poor girls, they scarce could keep upright!
 Work-days and feast-days just alike,
 Old Missus knew no rest or stay;
 They scarce could draw a breath for sewing all the day.
 At dawn, while they're asleep, the bell-pull tugs away,
 Like some alarum on the strike.
 Some mornings, you may think, the old lady's sure to
nap.

Oh no! Alas, a cock is in the house;
 The cock he crows, and up she'll rouse;
 She takes her cloak of fur, puts on her widow's cap,
 Lights in the stove a cheerless ray,
 Comes growling to the bed they love so much,
 She rakes them roughly out with hard and bony clutch,
 Or, if they're lazy, with her crutch,
 And spoils the lovely sleep that comes at break of day.
 There's nothing to be said!
 The poor things frown and yawn and, sick at heart,
 With all the warmth and comfort of their bed,
 However loth they feel, they have to part.
 Next morning just the same! The cock can hardly crow, -
 There Missus stands and beckons them away;
 They wake, and have to sew all day.
 'You devil's bird, that's you, we know!
 Once stop your cursed clack,' so through their teeth they
grumble,
 'So early out of bed we'd never have to tumble.

Confound you! – we'll be even yet!

They seized their chance: without the least regret,
They wrung his wretched neck, until the brute was dead.
What use? Of course, they thought, they'd have more time
in bed;

Alas, their fortune did not fall

That way at all!

Although there is no cock to hold their sleep in thrall,

Although that torturer is gone,

The dame stays up herself, to see they don't sleep on!

They're hardly gone to bed – they scarce can close their
eyes,

But every blessed morn, so early now they rise,

As never mortal cock was heard to give a call;

Poor girls, too late they recognise,

They've passed from frying-pan to fire – that's all!

So when you think that you'll escape from trouble,

The same sad fate too often you will find;

You get one worry off your mind;

There's something else that plagues you double.

STONE AND WORM

V. 6

'GOOD Heavens, what manners! What a noise he made!'

A stone upon the field against the rain inveighed:

'And all so pleased with him! Just watch their faces, do!

They waited for him, like a longed-for guest:

And he at best has rained an hour or two.

Suppose that my deserts were known!

I'm meek and modest, and wherever I am thrown

Without the least complaint I lie for ages long;

Yet, who has breathed a thank-you to a stone?

What wonder, then, if folks affirm
 This world's a wicked place where right must yield to
 wrong.'

'Enough of that!' exclaimed a worm;
 'However short it was, this shower of rain
 Refreshed the fields all round,
 Renewed the strength that drought would drain
 And made the anxious tiller hope again;
 But you're a useless lump, – a weight upon the ground!'

'I've served for forty years!'
 He dins it in your ears,
 And as for all the good he's done, –
 No better than this stone.

MIKE AMONG THE HIVES

V. 7

ONE spring the beasts, convened in yearly court,
 Elected Mike the Bear inspector of the honey.
 Perhaps you find this choice at least a trifle funny;
 For honey's hardly Micky's forte.
 Well, well! If no one made a mess!
 You must not ask the beasts for sense they don't possess.
 The candidates were far from strong,
 And all were turned away;
 By fortune's play
 The bear was there, and won the day.
 Well, things went wrong;
 For Mike the honey stole, and stored it in his den.
 This tale got out, and then
 Oh what a scandal in the place!
 It made a quite notorious case;

'The Court made Mike resign,
 They gave him punishment condign;
 To stay inside his den all winter in disgrace.
 They shut him up that very day,
 But left the honey where it lay;
 Mike didn't wag an ear; he had no word to say.
 To daylight Mike has said good-bye;
 'Tis nice inside his den to lie;
 He sucks his paw for hours together;
 No worse than waiting by the sea for weather!

MONKEY AND MIRROR

V. 8

A MONKEY in a glass her image chanced to see,
 And gently with her foot she nudged the bear,
 'I say, my friend; look here!' says she,
 'Observe that awful phiz,
 The wrinkles of the brow, the strange grimaces there!
 I'd hang myself in sheer despair,
 If I possessed a snout the slightest bit like this!
 And yet I'll count you pat
 Quite half a dozen friends, who're just as queer as that.'
 'Instead of counting friend on friend,
 'Twere best if to yourself you first of all attend!'
 So answers Mike the bear,
 But Micky's good advice is wasted on the air.

A hundred instances arise;
 In satire no one cares himself to recognise.
 I saw one only yesterday;
 That Brown has soiled his hands, is known to all the town,
 But when you talk of bribes to Brown,
 He gives a knowing wink and points at Grey.

RELYING on his hounds, a shepherd in the shade
 Lay sleeping; marking this, a snake whose hole was here,
 Came creeping up; his sting was very near;
 A moment more – the shepherd's part was played,
 Just then a gnat, with pity filled,
 As sharply as he could, the sleeper's forehead bit.
 The shepherd woke; the snake he quickly killed.
 But first, half drowsy still, his brow so sharp he hit,
 Of that poor gnat there was not left a trace.

And is that gnat's the only case?
 When little people try, in single-minded kindness,
 To get the strong to recognise their blindness,
 Be sure their only guerdon will be that
 Which killed the kindly gnat.

THE PEASANT AND DEATH

V. 10

HIS faggots on his back, in winter's bitterest cold,
 Worn out with toil and stress, a peasant frail and old,
 With heavy sighs and groans, each moment faltering more,
 Towards his smoky hut his heavy burden bore.
 For miles and miles he dragged his load,
 Then halted on the road,
 And dropped it on the ground, and let it lie,
 Sat down on it to rest and pondered with a sigh:
 'Lord, what a wretched man am I!
 Kept short of everything, with wife and children too;
 Ground rent and master's dues and tax on tax to pay;
 And when's the time I ever knew
 A single really happy day?'

So, girding at his lot, he cries Alack! Alack!
 And calls for Death. Death is not far away,
 He's just behind your back.
 A moment's span

And there he stands, and asks: 'Why did you call, old man?'
 Seeing his towering form and threatening face,
 The poor man scarce could say, still catching for his breath,
 'I called you – not to make you angry, Death;
 Please help me to put back my bundle in its place!'

And so we see
 From this short fable,
 Though life is full of misery
 To die is still more miserable.

THE KNIGHT

V. 11

IN days of old a certain knight
 Resolved to win new fame in strange adventures far,
 And started forth to war
 Against magicians fell and demons of the night.

He donned his coat of mail, and bade them bring his steed;
 But ere he leapt to mount his trusty horse,
 He thought it only due to make it this discourse:

'My true, my noble steed,
 To this my speech give heed!
 O'er mountain, field and wood, go follow out the line
 That straightest lies
 Before thine eyes.

'Tis so the laws of chivalry define,
 And that's the way to glory's shrine!

For when the Brobdingnags lie humbled by my sword,
And China's first princess stands blushing as my bride,
And mine are kingdoms far and wide,
Oh then thy toil, my friend, shall find its full reward!
My glory all with thee I'll share.
A palace for a Sultan meet
I'll build thee for thy stables there,
And lead thee out to graze on fields of pasture sweet.
Till now, why, even of oats 'tis little that thou knowest;
Abundance of good things awaits thee where thou goest.
Fine barley thou shalt eat, and honey-mead shalt drain.'
The knight to the saddle leapt, and threw the reins away,
But that young hero's steed, without the least delay,
Made straightway for his stall again.

A MAN AND HIS SHADOW V. 12

'LET's catch my shadow up!' some joker thought one day: He starts – it darts ahead – Thinks he : 'Then I'll go fast,'

Well, so does it: he's on the run at last.
Each time he mends his pace, that's what the shadow's
doing, -

Like sprite that lures and will not stay.
Our joker stops, walks leisurely away;
He turns and looks behind, – the shadow's now pursuing!

Young ladies, I've been often told it's true –
You think I mean? – Oh no! I never thought of you!
I mean, it's just the same that Fortune loves to do.
For one will lose his toil and trouble
In desperate attempts to catch her up all day.
Another, so it seems, runs straight the other way;
Why, not at all; herself she'll chase him at the double.

THE PEASANT AND HIS AXE V. 13

WHILE Hodge was shaping beams, his axe he scorned and
slighted;

He called it every name, got most excited;

A workman wondrous poor,

He laid the blame at axe's door.

A man to blame his tool will always find excuses:

'You brute,' at last he cries, 'I'll teach you what your use is;

You'll trim my garden stakes and nothing more;

I, with my knowledge and the pains I take,

And also my unusual skill,

Without your help, can go on building still;

With my good knife, I'll shape at will,

What others with an axe could never make.'

'I cut as you command: I have no other lot,'

The humble axe replies, when taken thus to task;

'You're master, and whate'er you ask

I question not,

And fall to any work that you dictate;

But just remember, that you mayn't regret too late, -

I know you're free my edge to blunt,

But build a house with knives, you won't!

LION AND WOLF

V. 14

A LION on a lamb had settled down to sup;

A mongrel pup,

About the royal board allowed to wander,

Snatched almost from his claws a piece of meat down
yonder.

The king of beasts looked on, not minding in the least,

For puppy was a young and foolish beast;

Observing this, the wolf began to ponder:

‘This lion seems so meek,
He must be very weak!’
He too put out a paw, some dainty snack to seek.
But woe befell the sinner;
He went to swell the lion’s dinner.
‘My friend,’ said Lion, as he calmly tore him up,
‘You saw me spare the dog, it’s true;
But so indulgent I should hardly be with you;
He’s young and stupid still, but you are not a pup.’

DOG, MAN, CAT AND HAWK V. 15

dog, Man and Cat and Hawk, be fair or foul the weather,
Swore each to the other troth, that never more they'd part, –
A friendship plain, unvarnished, true of heart;
The self-same den they shared; they took most meals
together;
They swore, in joy or grief, they'd always be the same,
That each would help the other,
Like sons of one same mother,
And each, if need should come, would die to save his brother.
Well, once when all were out, in concert hunting game,
These comrades leagued
So far from home had chanced to stray
That, hot and harassed and fatigued,
They stopped beside a stream to rest upon their way.
As there the party drowsed, one sitting and one lying,
All sudden rushed from out the wood
A hungry bear, whose jaws were yawning wide for food;
This fearful sight espying,
The Hawk took wing: the Cat had vanished with one bound;
Indeed, the Man would there his death have found,
But that true hound

Attacked the bear, and jumped and rolled upon him, —
His teeth he fastened on him;
Although his bones were crushed, the bear's great weight
beneath,
Although his pain and anger made him bellow,
He'd nipped him to the bone, fine fellow,
And still held on and never loosed his teeth,
Until his strength was gone and fixed his eyes in death.
And Man? 'Tis few of us, with shame I must declare,
For faithfulness with dogs compare;
So while the Dog engaged the Bear,
He just took up his gun, this scurvy wight,
Made off, and soon was out of sight.

Kind words, kind promises lie easy on the tongue;
You only know your friend when skies are overhung.
But such true friends, how rare they are!
Alas! the other kind's more common far.
You've seen my faithful Dog abandoned in the end;
No less,
When caught in dire distress
A man is rescued by his friend,
He'll leave his rescuer, if trouble should befall him,
And find no name too bad to call him!

SPIDER AND GOUT

V. 16

THE spider and the gout, 'twas Hell that gave them birth.
This version La Fontaine first spread about the earth;
To argue or debate with him I shall not try,
Of whether it was so, or how it was, or why;
For, as to fables, I can say,
I'd trust him blindly all the way;

And so there can't be any doubt
 'Twas Hell itself begat the Spider and the Gout.
 Well! When they were grown up, and now the time was
come

For each of some good post to capture the succession,
 (Big children, as you know, get out of hand at home;

Good fathers find them some profession),

Dispatching them for our oppression,

Thus spake their parent: 'Go – for I have blest you –
 Dear children, to the world! With wide domains invest
you!

My hopes are high for both of you;
 To your good father's name great honour you will do,
 And both will make quite sure that people shall detest you.

Survey the view from hence, and then declare
 What province each would covet for his share:

Great mansions here, luxurious and pleasant,

Out there, the hovel of the peasant;

Here space and comfort, all as fair as fair can be;
 There close and stuffy rooms, and toil and poverty.'

'No huts at all for me, my dear,'

Says Spider. 'As for me, I shall not want to bother
 With palaces,' says Gout, 'let them be for my brother;
 A country home for me, with ne'er a chemist near!

Or else, with doctors and their drugs all day,
 There's not a decent house where I can hope to stay.'
 'Agreed!' And both of them went forth the world to
see.

In rooms as splendid as can be,
 The Spider measured out the bounds of his domain;

On wardrobe richly carved he builded,

Or else along the cornice gilded

Spread everywhere his tangled skein,

And flies by thousands thought to gain.

But early in the morn – his work is just beginning –
A servant with a brush the tissue overthrows.
My Spider stands a lot; now round the stove he's spinning: –
The broom comes up and off he goes.
Poor Spider! Where to turn he hardly knows;
But wheresoe'er his web he stretches,
The feathers furk him out, the tireless besom fetches,
And all his work comes tumbling down, –
And sometimes he as well, and nearly breaks his crown.
My Spider's in despair; he up and leaves the town;
'I'll go and see where sister's been;
I guess, out there,' says he, 'she's living like a queen.'
He finds her country home; but when he sees her state, –
No spider in the world could be in such a strait;
Her master mows, whenever him she harries!
With her he cuts his wood, with her the water carries.
For simple folk, the motto, as you see,
Is this: The more you vex and plague the Gout,
The quicker you can drive the rascal out.
'No, brother dear,' says she; 'No country life for me!'
The Spider
Did not chide her.
He there and then exchanged for hers his share,
Crawled in at Hodge's door, set up his household there;
No fear of brush or broom;
He covers with his loom
The ceiling and the walls, the corners of the room.
So Gout sped off to find her fancy,
To country bade good-bye;
She reached the capital; in mansion vast and high
She grappled by the leg a white-haired Excellency.
The Gout was now in heaven; the old man's peace was
gone;
On downy cushions propped, they tossed and tumbled on.

Since then, these cheerful twins have never seen each other;
 And Sister Gout and Spider Brother
 Are both contented with their lot;
 In all untidy huts the Spider fares first-rate;
 The Gout prefers for hosts the wealthy and the great;
 Which shows what sense they both have got.

LION AND FOX

V. 17

THE Fox, who'd never seen the lion,
 The first time that they met, thought: 'Here's the day I'll
 die on!'

A little later on, again they met; the lion
 Seemed not so terrible to cast an eye on.
 And on the third occasion,
 The Fox, he walked straight up and started conversation.

And some folk strike us of a heap
 Until we take our second peep!

THE CREEPER

V. 18

A CREEPING plant grew close beside the wood,
 And to a barren stake contrived to cling.
 Now, in a field close by, a little oak tree stood.
 'Oh! What an ugly thing!
 A scarecrow such as that, can do no good!'
 So to the stake I heard the creeper whispering;
 'Compare with you, he never can,
 You stand so straight and tall, you're quite the gentleman;
 Although he has some leaves, 'tis true,
 They're coarse, and such a dirty hue!

'Or could it be his tusks that pulled him through?'
 The modest ox was heard to moo;
 'Perhaps his tusks for horns might pass!'

'Is no one here who'll tell you,' said the Ass,
 And flapped his heavy ears, 'how all their hearts he won
 And so got on?
 I saw it at a glance;
 Without his nice long ears, he never stood a chance!'

Perhaps we don't take note, but oft in various ways,
 In praising others, 'tis ourselves we praise.

A CLOUD

V. 20

ABOVE the hungry land that fainted with the heat
 A great cloud swept across the sky,
 And sparing ne'er a drop to slake the fields so dry,
 Upon the surging sea came down in one great sheet,
 Then boasted to the hill of her so generous flood.
 Says Hill: 'As far as I can see,
 It does not do the slightest good,
 Your generosity!
 It makes me angry as can be.

If those refreshing showers the country-side had laved,
 Your gift a starving realm from famine might have saved.
 Without your help, my friend, there's water in the sea.'

SLANDERER AND SNAKE

V. 21

IT'S nonsense to declare
 That devils don't for justice care;
 It's often they have shown, they like to have things fair.

K.F. L

I'll give an instance which occurred of late.
 When all the Powers of Hell marched out in state,
 The slanderer and the snake in that triumphant fête
 Disputed which came first, and, each one feeling slighted,
 Got quite excited.

Now, which could make the stronger case
 For claiming pride of place?
 For that, within the Kingdom of the Devil,
 Must go, of course, to him who did the world most evil.
 So, in the wrangle, which was long and heated
 The slanderer to convince his foe
 His poisonous tongue did show;
 The serpent showed the sting that makes her so conceited,
 Hissed out, she wouldn't suffer such affront,
 And did her best to push in front.
 Indeed, the slanderer's cause was lost, as it appeared;
 But this Beelzebub could not abide,
 And kindly deigned to take his side;
 He interfered,
 And told the snake to go behind;
 Though your deserts,' says he, 'I fully bear in mind,
 His claim to precedence more just than yours I find;
 You're vicious, and your sting will kill;
 Who comes too near, you seldom miss;
 You bite – and no mean title this –
 When no one means you ill.
 But say, who from afar by you was ever stung,
 As by this slanderer's vicious tongue,
 From which, though men may flee across the hills, the waves,
 No distance saves?
 Agree that he can do
 Worse ill than you;
 Then, just you go behind, and be more humble, pray!
 To slanderers, from that day, the snakes in hell give way.

WITH wallet patched and worn, his weary footsteps
trailing,

A beggar passed a house, and, gazing upward yonder

And at his own privations railing,

Could not repress his wonder

That some can make their homes as gorgeous as they please,

And wallow deep in wealth and luxury and ease

And yet, howe'er their pockets they may stuff,

Have ne'er enough.

'Indeed, as frequently as not,

Such wild extravagance they covet

That, always trying to increase their profit,

They end by finding they must part with what they've got!

For instance, now, the man who used to own that mansion,

Took up some lucky trade affair

Which grew to vast expansion.

Instead of stopping there

And finishing his days without a single care,

His business sold, with plenty and to spare,

He launched at turn of spring full many a gallant prow;

He hoped for piles of gold: – his ships are at the bottom;

The treasures that they brought, the hungry deep has got
'em;

It's there they're lying now,

And all his dreams of wealth are gone, he scarce knows
how.

Another, – he took up contracting,

And looked at first like making millions;

He wanted twice as much, – his greed was so exacting, –

And plunged so recklessly, he soon was in the Court;

You'd find a thousand more who fared the same, in short;

And serve them right, the villains!

Stop, beggar! Look and see! Dame Fortune, unexpected!
 She stands, and speaks you kind and fair: –
 ‘Of how to help you, friend, it’s long that I’ve reflected;
 This heap of sovereigns I’ve collected;
 Put out your knapsack! There!
 I’ll fill it to the top;
 But here my favours stop;
 Each sovereign as it falls is pure and solid gold;
 But all the shining coins your knapsack cannot hold,
 Will turn to rubbish as they drop.
 Remember, in advance I’ve warned you to beware;
 I’m ordered to observe exactly this condition;
 Your bag is very old, – don’t stuff it to repletion!
 Be sure it holds what it can bear!’
 It takes my beggar’s breath, this news so rare;
 He almost feels he steps on air.
 His purse he opens wide and, bountifully streaming,
 Pours in the golden rain of sovereigns bright and gleaming.
 The bag weighs double what it did before.
 ‘Enough?’ ‘Oh no, not yet!’ ‘It’s splitting!’ ‘Never mind!’
 ‘You’re rich as Cræsus now!’ ‘Please, please, a little more,
 One handful! Room I’ll find!’
 ‘It’s time to stop! Your bag is bursting! Are you blind?’
 ‘The smallest trifle more!’ But look! the bag has burst!
 His bullion tumbles out, and crumbles on the floor;
 Dame Fortune too is gone! He has his bag – no more!
 Our beggar-man remains a beggar, as at first.

FROGGY AND JUPITER

V. 23

ONE spring, a frog that in the swamp resided,
 Well up the neighbouring hill decided
 To make a move;

To stop the worry and to save the cost,
 A fine new poultry-house he started sketching out,
 Whose bolts and bars should give such stout resistance
 That thieves should have to keep their distance,
 With all a fowl could want, and room to move about.

He'd heard that Fox as architect was skilled,

A very master

At lath and plaster;

So Fox was asked that house to build.

The Fox he set about this building with a will,

He failed not to apply

His utmost zeal, his greatest skill;

The work when finished was a sight to charm the eye:—

With all that you could want: with heaps of food to eat,

Nice perches everywhere the Fox contrived to fit in,

With splendid shelter from the cold or heat,

And most commodious nooks for brooding hens to sit
 in.

To Fox be praise and honour paid;

A handsome subsidy was granted him that day,

And order straight was made,

To move the poultry in without delay.

And now, no doubt, they lived secure?

Well, no! The building looked all right;

The fence was high, the joints were tight:

Yet hour by hour the fowls were fewer.

To trace the mischief baffled all their thought,

But Lion set a watch, and whom d'you think they caught?

That same bad Fox, you mind!

For though this house, it's true, stood fast on every
 side,

And no one, if they tried,

Could force a way inside,

He'd made a sliding door that only he could find.

HOW oft when we commit some act that brings us shame,
On some one else we put the blame;
How very often we exclaim:
‘Except for him I’d really not have thought of it!’
If we alone that sin have done,
It must have been the Evil One,
Though he, in fact, knows absolutely nought of it,
Examples manifold. A single one I’ll give.

In some far Eastern land a Brahmin once did live,
Who though in words a great divine,
In deeds was anything but good; –
Even Brahmins aren’t all genuine;
Well, that be as it may; but this is how it stood, –
He in the saintly brotherhood
Alone was insincere; the others
Lived each and all as holy brothers;
The thing that vexed him most was this:
His godly prior, like the rest sincere,
Was terribly severe,
And not a brother dared in aught to do amiss.
My Brahmin none the less was enterprising;
See him, this day of fast, devising
How to dispense himself a dinner on the sly;
He’s got an egg; when midnight has gone by,
He lights a candle – no one nigh;
And over it the egg he cooks.
He turns it gently round above the flickering flame,
At nothing else he looks,
Then glibly gulps it down,
And chuckles as he thinks of how the prior’d frown;
‘You didn’t catch me all the same,

My bearded friend, I think you're beaten;
 How nice that egg! How neatly eaten!
 But see, with folded hands,
 There at his side the prior stands;
 He saw this great transgression;
 With threatening looks he waits confession;
 The proof's before his eyes; too late to bar the door!
 'Good father, pardon me!
 Oh let my sin forgotten be!
 Our Brahmin prays in anguish sore;
 'I hardly know myself, how I could come to do it;
 Ah, 'twas some wretched fiend that urged me to it!
 But here from out the stove a voice replies: 'For shame!
 Yes,' cries the little fiend, 'it's always us you blame;
 Why, I myself from you
 Have just learnt something new;
 For till to-day I never knew
 How eggs are cooked by candle-flame.'

FORTUNE ON A VISIT

V. 26

AT Fortune's fickle ways too often we exclaim.
 Who fails of wealth, who fails of rank,
 Declares he has but her to thank.
 Yet, think! 'Tis you yourself that are to blame.
 Blind luck, as through the world she roves on floating wings,
 Not always makes abode with nobles or with kings;
 She in your humble cottage too
 Perhaps may some time choose to make a passing stay;
 But lose no time, that precious day
 When Fortune makes her call on you!
 A minute spent with her, if only used aright,
 Long years of patience will requite,

But if, with luck to help, there's nothing you attain,
The blame upon yourself and not on Fortune throw;
 And know,
That maybe all your life she'll never come again.

A queer old rambling house stood just outside the town.

'Twas here three brothers lived, too close to disentangle,
And never were they known to wrangle.
But no success would come to crown
A single task they might essay;
'Twas toil and trouble all the way.

To judge by what they said, 'twas Fortune was to blame;
Well once, all unawares, Dame Fortune came
And, touched their piteous poverty to see,
Resolved with all her might to help all three,
No matter what the work that each one wished to do;
With them she vowed to stay the summer
through:

That's taking matters seriously.
To quite another tune does business now progress.
The first in trade had had but poor success;
Now, buy or sell, he's sure to win;
He sits and scoops his profits in;
What risks he takes he need not care;
He soon becomes a millionaire!

The second served the State; at any time but this,
He'd stick among the clerks, with brains as poor as his,
But now no shot that he essays,
But proves a killer!

Each dinner that he gives, each call he pays,
His rank, his salary they raise.
Why see! He's got a house, and country seat, and villa!
And now about the third! Did he not win some prize?

No doubt, for him as well, Dame Fortune did her best?
Indeed she did: with him, she hardly took a rest.

The third was all the summer catching flies;

He hardly had to make the endeavour,

I never!

I know not if before our friend at this was clever,

But nothing now in vain he tried;

He need but lift his hand: with Fortune at his side,

Each time, he got it, sure as ever!

Meanwhile the time their guest could spare, is gone;

She travels further on.

Two brothers count their gains; the first is rich, the other

Has rank and riches too; and yet the youngest brother

Complains that he alone, unhappy man,

Is left where he began.

Yourself, dear reader, judge his claim,

And tell me who's to blame!

Book VI

A WANDERING wolf, that prowled around the fold,
 Did through the fence behold,
 How choosing out a sheep, the fattest and the best,
 The shepherds at their ease set putting it to death;
 The dogs lay peacefully at rest.
 He turned in spite away, and snarled beneath his breath,
 'Ho, ho, my friends, you'd make a fine to-do,
 If that were me instead of you!'

CUCKOO AND WOOD-PIGEON

A CUCKOO on a bough kept cuckooing her woe.
 'Why, friend, how sadly you go moaning on!
 A kindly wood-pigeon cooed soft and low;
 'Or is it that it grieves you so,
 That spring is gone
 And love as well: the sun much lower in the sky,
 And frosts of winter drawing nigh?'
 'And how could I more cheerful be?'
 Says Cuckoo in reply. 'I'll put my case to you!
 This spring I fell in love – my love was happy too,
 And soon I got my chicks, you see.
 Yet not a little bit my children care for me.
 Is this the gratitude I thought they would have shown?
 No wonder if I feel quite jealous, you must own,
 When nestle round the duck the little ducklings all,
 Or such a train of chicks come up at Henny's call;
 And I must sit and moan, uncared for and alone,
 Not knowing what it's like, when children love you dearly.'
 'Poor thing, how very sad! I feel for you sincerely.'

If mine did that to me, I think that I should die,
 Although it happens to the best.
 Of course, that means by now you've taught them all to
 fly.

But when had you the time to build your nest?
 I never noticed, I admit;
 I always saw you on the flit!
 'Oh that was dull, a single day
 To waste in brooding on my nest;
 'Tis in my neighbours' nests, my eggs I always lay.'
 'Yet you expect that you'll be petted and caressed!'
 Was all her neighbour had to say.

Fathers and mothers too, this lesson is for you.
 I do not tell my tale, the children's case to prove.
 To let your parent lack for love
 And honour, that's a sin, it's true;
 But if your chicks grow up, without a parent's care,
 In none but alien hands that work for pay alone,
 Why, is not then the fault your own,
 That you, in your old age, get little comfort there.

A COMB

VI. 3

to comb the fluffy head of pretty little Tom,
 Mamma once bought a nice new comb.
 To Tom 'twas like a toy, he'd never let it be;
 And, while he played at games or said his A B C,
 He always combed his golden hair;
 As smooth and curly as a lambkin's fleece,
 Like finest flax, so soft and fair,
 He combed it, and he combed, as if he could not cease.

And what a comb it was! It never left a scratch;
 It did not even stick or catch;
 It went so gently through the hair;
 He thought this comb of his, the finest and most rare.
 Well, once the comb got lost; it happened on a day,
 When Tom had got excited in his play.
 All rough and tousled was his hair;
 When nurse would put it right, he howled with might and
 main;

‘Oh where’s my comb? Oh where?’
 At last the comb was found again.
 But now, to pass it through, ’tis all in vain he tries;
 It only tugs until he cries.
 ‘You nasty horrid comb,’
 Cries naughty Tom;
 ‘Oh no!’ the comb replies, ‘My friend, I’m just the
 same,
 You’ve got your tousled head to blame.’
 But naughty angry Tom, not ceasing to abuse it,
 Into the river threw his comb away;
 Now ’tis the water-nymphs that use it!

And this I’ve noticed in my day:
 The very same with truth we do.
 If conscience feels no speck upon her,
 Then truth is what we want, and truth is what we
 honour;
 We hear, we act upon it too.
 But once your conscience is not clear,
 Let truth not dare to venture near,
 ’Tis just like Tommy’s hair; your comb you won’t put
 through it,
 Because it hurts to do it.

THE miser loses all, when all he tries to gain;
 Examples one might seek for hours in vain;
 There's plenty, as I know; they're somewhere in my head,
 But I'm too slack to look them up: instead,
 I'll tell a well-known tale again.

Well, when I was a babe, they told me of a miser;
 There was a man – Who was he? I'm no wiser –
 He knew no handicraft, he had no trade,
 And yet his money chests were bursting with their captures!
 He had a wondrous fowl – one understands his raptures, –
 To which he was beholden
 For eggs – no common sort it laid,
 But golden.
 Now you or I'd be satisfied
 To know that every day your purse is stretched more wide.
 Not so our miser! He, I fear,
 Conceived the strange idea
 That if he killed the fowl, 'twould all be gold inside.
 And so, forgetting quite its kindly contribution,
 Though black ingratitude be written to his score,
 He cut the chicken up. And what? In retribution,
 He found that it contained just chicken-guts, – no more!

TWO CASKS

VI. 5

two casks are carted down the road;
 One carries wine, the other has no load;
 The first goes smoothly on without a sound,
 The other turning round
 With jolt and jump and bound;

It makes the causeway echo loud;
The dust is rising like a cloud;
The anxious wayfarers far off the hubbub hear
And turn aside in fear;
And yet for all its fuss and pother,
It has no value like the other.

Who prates of his affairs incessantly to all,
In him, be sure, the worth is small.
The man of action oftenest speaks low;
'Tis by their sounding deeds the great their greatness show,
But turn their weighty projects round
Without a sound.

ALCIDES

VI. 6

ALCMENE'S glorious son,
So famed for mighty deeds, in manhood ne'er excelled,
One day his dangerous course by narrow pathway held,
Both cliff and precipice to shun.
Curled up upon his path, some tiny creature lies,
'Tis something hedgehog-like; how strange! What can it
be?

He tries to crush it with his heel, but see!
It swells before his eyes, and grows to twice the size.
It makes Alcides' anger rise;
He grips his heavy club, and strikes it blow on blow;
But no!

Only more terrible its outlines show.
It puffs and swells and grows so stout,
It nearly blocks the sunlight out
And bars the only road where he can go.
He hurls his club away and, troubled and astounded,
He stops as if confounded!

But see Athene stands beside her brother: –
 ‘Give up the hopeless task; this pest you cannot smother;
 The monster’s name is Spite.
 This growth, when left alone, you scarcely will descry,
 But if you try to crush it with your blows,
 At every blow you strike, the grislier it grows
 And darkens all the sky.’

APELLES AND THE YOUNG ASS VI. 7

CONSUMED with vanity, the fool
 Admires himself for that which others ridicule,
 And often makes a boast
 Of that which ought to shame him most.

Apelles meeting with the little ass
 Invited him to tea that very night.
 The little ass was trembling with delight;
 He prances through the wood; he pesters all who pass:
 ‘Apelles bores me so;
 He will not let me be, you know!
 Whenever him I see,
 He asks me in to tea;
 I’m sure he wants to paint a Pegasus from me.’
 ‘Oh no!’ Apelles said, – he happened to be near –
 ‘The judgment of King Midas I am painting,
 Myself with you acquainting
 Because you seem to boast the proper length of ear.
 So if you’ll come to tea,
 Most happy I shall be;
 For long-eared asses are not rare,
 But with the ears that you can show
 No little ass I know
 Or big ass either, ever could compare!’

'OH yes,' we often say, 'there's lots of time to spare!'

To tell the truth, we have to own,

We don't consult our reason there

But laziness alone!

Then, if there's work to do, why, do it straight away,

And grumble at yourself and not at fortune, pray!

To find you're unprepared, when fortune comes your way;

And that's the truth that in this tale is shown.

A sportsman with his bag, his cartridges, his gun,

And Hector, partner of each taste and habit,

Set out to shoot a bird or rabbit, -

With gun unloaded, though advised by every one

To load before he left the door.

'What rubbish!' he exclaims. 'Have I not been before?

And not since I was born, one sparrow in the air!

'Twill take an hour before I'm really there;

I'd load a hundred times, and still have time to spare.'

He hasn't left the clearing -

As if Dame Fortune at his thoughts were jeering -

When he discovers,

A swarm of ducks the water covers!

And easily our country cousin

With one good shot could do for half a dozen;

No doubt!

'Twould feed him for a week, about: -

That is, if he had charged his gun when he set out!

And now he loads in haste, but ducks will watch your finger,

And ducks don't linger.

Before the gun is loaded quite,

They raise a cry, they all take wing

And high above the wood stretch out in one long string;

A minute, and they're out of sight.

In vain he scours the wood by crooked paths and narrow;
The wood's a wilderness, he never sees a sparrow.

Alas, mishap provokes mishap;

There bursts with thunder clap,

A storm to drown a duck.

His weary steps see Sportsman homeward drag:

Not one dry rag;

An empty bag;

And yet he puts the blame not on himself – but luck!

BOY AND SNAKE

VI. 9

A CARELESS boy, who thought it was an eel,

Picked up a snake and, when he saw his error,

Turned whiter than his shirt with terror.

The serpent fixed on him her quiet eye of steel;

'Mark what I say!' said she. 'If so your wits go straying,

Such tricks not every time so cheaply you will dare;

For once, God lets it pass; another time, take care,

Be sure with whom you're playing!

THE SWIMMER AND THE SEA

VI. 10

THROWN up upon the shore by breakers rolling high,

A swimmer fell asleep

And slumbered long and deep,

And when he woke, began to curse the sea:

'Tis you're to blame for all,' said he: –

'So treacherously calm you lie!

You lure us at your beck to follow,

And once allured, the unfathomed waters swallow.'

Before the swimmer's eyes, the sea all shining bright
Took on the form of Amphitrite.

'Why make this idle charge, young stranger?
My waters you can sail with neither doubt nor danger;
But when the ocean depths come raging to the assault,
The sons of Æolus are then at fault;

'Tis they refuse to let me be,
And if you don't believe, come try yourself and see!
When once the wind's asleep, launch vessels as you will;
Why, then the earth itself is not so still!

You ask me what I think? The advice is good, I grant;
Yet sail without a wind, you generally can't.

ASS AND RUSTIC

VI. 11

JOHN HODGE, who kept a garden full of fruit
An ass's help enlisted,
The shameless raids of crows and sparrows to dispute.
An ass more honest ne'er existed,
To theft and robbery a stranger,
With whom not even a leaf of master's was in danger.
There's none will say the birds were spared or left in
quiet,
And yet the crop turned out not much to boast about.
The Ass went rushing round to put the birds to rout,
Among the plants he scampered in and out,
And ran so rude a riot,
That all the beds were crushed and trampled right across.
So finding all his labour end in loss,
The peasant on the Ass's back
Repaid his loss with whack on whack.

‘Of course,’ I hear you say: ‘And very proper too!
 The donkey should not try
 A job he cannot do!’

I do not seek at all, the ass to justify!
 He’s paid the penalty, and so he should, say I;
 But don’t you think the man might ask himself for par-
 don,
 For trusting to an ass to watch his kitchen garden?

WOLF AND CRANE

VI. 12

WE’RE all aware the wolf’s a glutton;
 A wolf, when at his mutton,
 Of bones takes little note;
 A wolf once found a bone was sticking in his throat;
 It stopped his breath, well nigh;
 Poor wolf! No room to pass a sob or sigh;
 He might as well put out his legs and die!
 Just then, to his good luck, a crane was standing by;
 He signalled his distress; he showed his sorry plight,
 And begged the crane to put his trouble right.
 The crane, his neck and beak
 Thrust down the wolf’s red mouth; it took him time to
 seek,
 But soon he brought the bone to light,
 And asked the wolf his labour to requite.
 ‘Come,’ cried the cunning brute. ‘That’s good!
 You ask for payment? Where’s your gratitude?
 ’Tis not enough, you think, that forth you safely drew
 That great long neck of yours – your silly noddle too!
 Be off, my friend! Get out!
 And mind you take good care I don’t see you about!’

two flies for foreign parts were starting off from home,
And wanted to persuade a neighbouring bee to come:

The parrots told amazing stories;
Of strange and distant lands they painted all the glories;
Besides, their proper pride was wounded, so they claimed.

‘Wherever people are about,

They all combine to chase us out.

It goes so far – and aren’t the men ashamed!

And what peculiar folks they are!–

To see we shall not dine upon the pasties,

Where’er some dainty feast is,

With covers on each dish, the least approach they bar!

And every snatch of rest the wicked spiders mar.’

‘A pleasant journey then!’ to them the Bee replied;

‘But as for me,

I find the country-side as pleasant as can be!

The friends my honey-combs have won me far and wide,

From countrymen to nobles range.

Fly East or West

As suits you best;

No change of place your luck will change;

As you are useless everywhere,

Affection and respect you can’t expect to share;

’Tis none but spiders, that will hold you dear –

The same out there as here.’

Who tries to serve his country rightly,

Will never leave her lightly.

The idler who can serve no public use

May well on foreign soil his greatest pleasure find;

He’s just a foreigner, so meets with less abuse;

And if he loafs all day, there’s no one needs to mind!

NOW once there was an ant whose strength was quite enormous;

Since first the world began, his fellow ne'er was born;
 He even – so with truth the chronicles inform us –
 Could pick you up with ease two grains of barley-corn.
 Then as to bravery, such pluck was never known;

A worm he wouldn't look at twice,

But nipped it like a vice,

And often would attack a spider all alone.

Well, soon he got so great a name

In all the anthill population,

That scarce another theme engaged their conversation.

Excessive praise, I find,

Is poison to the mind,

But this good ant of ours was not the same;

He heard it with delight;

His self-conceit was so absurd,

He took it word for word.

At last with compliments his head was stuffed so tight,

He thought he'd show himself in town,

That there his strength might win renown –

Upon the largest load of hay

Beside the driver climbed one day,

And rode to town like any lord.

But oh, how wounding to his dear desire!

He thought the folks would come from all the shire

As if the town had got on fire.

Oh no! He finds he's quite ignored.

There each is busy with his own affairs;

Our ant he finds a leaf and trails it on the ground;

He does a clever fall, he makes a nimble bound;

There's no one sees, and no one cares,

So when he'd exercised as much as he was able,
 He said in sheer disgust to Tray,
 Who crouched beside his master's dray,
 'Say, shall I seem unreasonable
 If in your town I find
 The folks are very dull and blind?
 How is it, no one pays the notice that they owe me
 For all the feats that I display?
 Now if you come our way,
 I fancy all our anthill know me.'
 A wiser ant went home that day.

 And that's the way
 The clever fool mistakes;
 He thinks the world re-echoes with his name
 And wakes,
 To find his anthill's bounds the limit of his fame.

THE SHEPHERD AND THE SEA VI. 15

HARD by King Neptune's realm, a shepherd came to graze;
 He built upon the shore a cosy little hut,
 And fed his sheep around this pleasant spot;
 And happily he passed his days.
 He knew no pomp or pride, he knew no misery,
 Indeed, his pleasure in his lot
 Was such as, well may be, the most of kings have not.
 But day by day observing on the sea
 The ships that carried in new stores of every treasure,
 The rich and divers wares piled up upon the quays,
 The warehouse packed beyond its measure,
 And how their owners lived in luxury and ease ~

The smiles of Fortune he was keen to court;
 He sold his house and flock, bought wares of every sort,
 Freightened a vessel and set out from port.

His venture was but short!

How treacherous the sea, there's none but knows,
 And this he had to learn; the coast not out of sight,

A fearful storm arose;

The ship was wrecked, the cargo sank outright;

He scarce could struggle to the shore.

Thanks to the hunger of the deep, once more
 He takes a shepherd's place, but with this difference --

No longer for himself he labours,

The sheep he keeps are now his neighbour's.

A hireling! Yet although your losses be immense,
 There's many a loss that time and patience can restore.

He saves on that, he saves on this,

He saves, till in the end a second flock is his:

The shepherd of his sheep is master as before.

One day, upon the sandy shore, --

The sun above him blazing,

His flock beside him grazing, --

He sits and scans the ocean o'er.

Now scarce a ripple shows on all that mighty tide,

So peaceful lies the main;

And smoothly to the quay the stately vessels glide.

'My friend,' he cries, 'you want more money, it is plain,

But if 'tis mine, you ask in vain;

Find some one else, whose mind is still unsteady;

You've had your toll from me already.

Fools, such as I was, there may be;

But not a farthing more you ever get from me!

This tale I meant to leave, as self-interpreted,

But should the words remain unsaid?

Far better guard what's yours for sure,
 Than follow in the wake of Hope's deceptive lure!
 'Tis thousands you will find left shivering in the cold,
 For one she has not cheated all the way;
 For me, no matter what they say,
 I'll tell them, as I've always told –
 'To-morrow, come what may: but what I have, I hold.'

SNAKE AND MASTER WILL VI. 16

A SNAKE crept in to Master Will;
 'Oh, neighbour, let's be friends! too long we've been
 estranged;
 No need to fancy now, I'll do you any ill.
 Just look at me yourself! I'm absolutely changed.
 Why, ever since the spring, I wear this nice new skin!
 But all her specious pleas could not take William in.
 He gave the snake a clout;
 'Tis true,' said he, 'you've changed your hide;
 The same old wicked heart's inside.'
 So William knocked his neighbour out.

When once you've given cause to count you as no good,
 Then shift the mask howe'er you would,
 You cannot hide yourself from view,
 And what befell the snake may happen too to you.

FOX AND THE GRAPES VI. 17

THE hungry Reynard leaps across the garden wall;
 Rich grapes in bunches meet his sight:
 And as his eyes upon them fall,
 Both eyes and teeth are shining bright;
 Those juicy bunches shine like jasper, in the light,

The only mischief is, they hang so high;
 Whichever way he sidles up to snatch them,
 They catch the eye –
 The tooth can't catch them!
 He wastes upon them one whole hour,
 Then turns away, and growls in spite: 'No matter!
 Although it looks a dainty platter,
 They're all unripe! There's not a grape but's sour!
 Why should I want my teeth to chatter?'

SHEEP AND DOGS

VI. 18

THE shepherds of a certain flock,
 In order that the wolves might leave their sheep in peace,
 The number of their dogs decided to increase.
 What followed? Soon of dogs they kept so large a stock,
 That, as to wolves, their sheep in perfect peace were basking.
 But dogs, you know, must eat as well.
 The shepherds took the wool to sell,
 And then the dogs might share
 Sheep chosen here and there
 Till only five or six were left, the tale to tell;
 And these the dogs devoured without the asking.

MIKE IN THE NET

VI. 19

MIKE

Chanced upon a net to strike.
 Of death in general, 'tis lightly we may chatter,
 But death at hand is quite another matter,
 And death is not at all what he would like!

Our bear is game enough to fight you fifty rounds,
 But now he's tangled in the net;
 On every side he's close beset
 With guns and pitchforks, men and baying hounds.
 No fighting chance remains;
 So Mike decides to use his brains.
 He hails the Huntsman: 'My good fellow, tell me do,
 What earthly harm I've done to you?
 It seems you want my life. But why?
 You surely don't believe those tales against the bear,
 That talk of cruelty, so monstrously unfair;
 For instance, if you ask my neighbours, they'll reply
 That out of all the beasts there's no one else but I, -
 And this there's no one can deny -
 Who never touched a man that's dead!'
 'Well, that is true enough!' the sly old huntsman said:
 'I'm very pleased to find such reverence for the dead.
 But when the chance has come your way
 It's not so oft you've let the living get away;
 Then better eat the dead, I say,
 And leave alone the live instead.'

A BLADE OF CORN

VI. 20

A BLADE of corn stands trembling in the breeze;
 Inside the greenhouse glass he spies
 A tender little flower in comfort, care and ease.
 Meanwhile himself beneath a swarm of flies
 He stands exposed to storm and heat and cold
 And thus his master he begins to scold:
 'Why do we look to men for justice all in vain?
 Whoever has the art to please your taste, your eye,
 To him there's nothing you deny;
 But he that helps you live, uncared for may remain!

DON'T think the traitor prospers long!
 'Tis those will most despise him and abuse him,
 Who, when they needed him, were not ashamed to use
 him.
 The traitor is the first to find his hopes go wrong.

A worm once begged a peasant
 To let him use his garden for the present.
 Oh! Such an honourable worm he'll be;
 He'll only nibble leaves – not touch the fruit at all,
 And even only leaves that soon were sure to fall.
 'And why,' the peasant thought, 'refuse a boon so small?
 My garden, certainly, has room for him and me;
 Then let him live! The air is free.
 As far as I can see, there's no great mischief follows,
 If here and there a leaf he swallows.'
 He gave his leave; the worm crawled up upon a tree
 And sheltered 'neath a branch from all the winds that be;
 No surfeit, but with nought to fret him,
 He lived and let the world forget him.
 Meanwhile upon the fruit King Phœbus shed his light;
 Now, in that garden fair, where everything shone bright,
 As clear as amber, juicier each day,
 An apple on a branch threw back the golden ray;
 Long since, a roguish boy this luscious fruit enchanted;
 Of all the rest, on this his greedy eyes he planted;
 Some way to get it – that was what he wanted;
 To climb, our rogue could find no foothold firm;
 He had not strength to shake the tree;
 So how to fetch it down, in short he could not see.
 Then who proposed his help, to steal this fruit? The
 worm.

'Now listen,' says the worm, 'I'm sure I am not wrong;
 The master's told his men that tree to pick;
 So both for you and me, it won't be here for long;
 But I'll engage to get it double quick.
 Now just you share with me, and when the fruit is ours,
 You take ten times as much as falls to me!
 The tiniest share will be
 Enough for me to suck for hours and hours.'
 They quickly came to terms,
 How much was boy's, how much was worm's,
 Then briskly with his task the worm began to grapple.
 He quickly filed the fruit away.
 But, say, what guerdon came his way?
 As there upon the ground it lay,
 The boy ate up the fruit, and all the pips to spare;
 And as the worm crawled up to claim his share,
 The boy brought down his heel, and squashed him then
 and there;
 And so there was no worm, and so there was no apple!

A FUNERAL

VI. 22

IN Egypt long ago, to bury men in state,
 They hired out women-folk who followed this vocation,
 To walk behind the hearse and utter lamentation.
 One day, then, while they bury some one great,
 A weeping crowd, with groans that never cease,
 The late lamented from this life so short,
 To his last home escort,
 To rest in peace.
 A stranger, watching, thinks that sorrow of this sort
 None but the kinsfolk of the dead could show;
 'Tell me,' he asks them, 'would you soon forget your woe,

Were I to bring him back to you?
I am a wizard: 'tis a thing that I can do;
We have but to apply a charm most efficacious –
 'To life the dead man starts.'
'Good father,' they exclaim, 'rejoice our weeping hearts;
Only in this beside we pray you to be gracious,
 In three days' time or four,
 The dead might die once more;
In life, men looked for good in him, in vain;
'Tis hardly likely, he'll be better now.
 So kill him off, no matter how!
And then they'll hire us out to mourn for him again.'

And many a millionaire won't help the world a bit,
 Except by leaving it.

THE INDUSTRIOUS BEAR VI. 23

MIKE saw that Father James by making carriage-bows¹
Had put some tidy savings by:
(To bend a carriage-bow your patience you must try.)
Thinks Mike: 'I'd like to live, by making things like those.'
He starts, and what a crash and clatter!
You hear the noise a mile away.
Birch, walnut, elm, see Micky shatter.
But though the trees he spoils, are quite a serious matter,
The business fails to pay!
He goes to Father James and asks him what's amiss.
'Look here, my friend,' says Mike, 'now what's the cause of
this?

¹ The *duga*, made out of a piece of a bough, which arches over the horse's neck, sometimes with bells attached to it.

I smash the branches finely, that I know! –
 But have not bent a single carriage-bow.
 Do tell me what's required, for such like occupations!
 'You ask me, neighbour, what?
 Well, something that you have not got:
 It's patience.'

AUTHOR AND ROBBER

VI. 24

DOWN in the shadows' gloomy home,
 To face the infernal judge there come,
 At one same hour a robber bold
 (Who on the highways plundered those who passed
 But fell into a trap at last),
 With him an author, famed for writings manifold:
 A subtle poison he throughout his work distilled,
 He stole his readers' faith and taught them to be vicious;
 In honeyed words like siren skilled
 And like the siren, most pernicious.
 In hell the shrift of law is short;
 No judge delays; no witness feigns;
 Straight comes the sentence of the Court:
 On two tremendous iron chains,
 Two brazen cauldrons huge were hung on high to view;
 In these the two condemned were seated;
 Beneath the robber's perch a furnace vast was heated:
 Megæra's self the bellows blew,
 And raised so dread a flame, alack!
 That through the vaults of hell the very stone did crack.
 Far milder seemed the author's penalty:
 'Tis scarce a smouldering spark beneath his perch you
 see,

But wait! The sullen flame wins strength by burning longer,
 And, as the years go by, still stronger grows and stronger.
 By now, the robber's pile long since has burned away,
 The author's flames grow fiercer day by day.

As fiercer still they rise,

The author in his torment cries:

'The justice of the gods is nothing but a story;

I filled creation with my glory,

And if my writings were a trifle free,

I have surely paid by now in double fee.

Good heavens! A highwayman judged guilty of less harm!

But then and there, in all her fearsome charm,

The hissing serpents through her ringlets creeping,

Her bloody scourge around her sweeping,

Of Hell's high sisters three the first was at his side.

'Unhappy man,' she straight replied,

'Shalt thou revile the wrath divine,

This robber and thyself to set on one same line?

His guilt is nothing, when compared with thine.

His life was violence and wrong;

His race is run,

His sins are done;

But thou – thy bones, indeed, by now have mouldered long,

Yet, not one day the sun can rise,

Without he brings to light thy new-wrought infamies.

The venom in thy works no lapse of years assuages;

Diffused a thousandfold, each day more fierce it rages;

Look!' (and the map of life before his eyes unrolled),

'The million evil deeds behold;

The million miseries which in thy count we see:

Children that shamed their homes are there,

With loving parents' last despair;

From whom did mind and heart such poison take? From
 thee.

Who mocked at government and marriage vow,
 In law a childish dream did find,
 Set down to these alone all woes that scourge our kind,
 And strove the social bond to tear asunder? Thou.
 Didst thou not glorify unfaith and call it knowledge,
 With fair alluring words seductively entice
 To passion and to vice,
 Till see, as scholars in thy cursed college,
 Yon whole disordered nation
 Runs rife
 With murder and with devastation,
 With mutiny and civil strife,
 By teachers, such as thou, to dissolution brought?
 Each tear, each drop of blood declares what thou hast wrought.
 Shalt thou against the gods thy tongue with censure arm?
 And who can say what future harm
 Thy fatal lore has still to do?
 Endure, then! Thou hast given, and here thy due must take.'
 'Twas so the wrathful fury spake.
 And dashed the cover to!

LAMBKIN

VI. 25

 HOW often I have heard it vaunted:
 'For all it hurts me, blame me all day long,
 If only in my heart I've done no wrong.'
 No, something more than that is wanted,
 Unless you'd wreck yourself in neighbour's estimation
 And lose an honest reputation.
 Young ladies, most for you, 'tis everything,
 To know that your good name is more than any charm,
 And like a flower in spring,
 A single gust can do it harm.

How oft, though soul be clear and conscience free of blame,
Some glance or word you'd spare if once you looked around
you,

May give the slanderer a chance to wound you,
And things will never be the same.
'Then, am I not to look? And am I not to smile?'
Oh no! I don't say that! And yet in all you do,
You'd best be watchful, all the while,
To give malicious tongues no peg to fasten to.

Now Dorothy, my dear,
For you and all your playmates here,
I've made this fable up. Sit down and learn it straight!
When you're a great big girl, you'll find
It's well to bear my tale in mind:
So list to little lambkin's cruel fate.
Come from your corner, dear, leave Dolly in it!
The tale will hardly last a minute.

A foolish lamb
Desired the part of wolf to sham;
All round the fold, in wolfling's hide he went;
To cut a dash was all the lambkin meant;
But as he swaggered round, the dogs began to howl:
They thought it was a wolf come out upon the prow;
They jumped and fell on him and rolled him to the ground:
Before the unlucky lamb his wandering wits had found
They mauled him up, and nearly tore to pieces.
Good luck! The shepherd's here. Poor Lambkin he releases.
But ah! to jaws of dogs no joke to pay a visit,
Is it?

Poor thing! The shock had so upset him,
Scarce to the fold his failing legs could get him,
He lost more weight each day,
He simply pined away,

And never ceased to groan in fear and trembling.
But if he'd thought the very least,
The wolf, of all, was not the beast
He'd care about resembling!

Book VII

ONE day the mice conspired to make the world ecstatic;
 Let Toms and Pussies gnash their teeth in spite,
 Let cooks and housekeepers go mad outright;
 Their deeds the trump of fame, insistent and emphatic,
 Shall sound from cellar up to attic.

For this, a standing Board should meet that night,
 Where mice were not allowed – this rule a trifle odd
 is, –

Whose tails were not the length of all their bodies;
 According to the mice, if lots of tail is showing,

A mouse is knowing,

And must be smarter than the rest.

We will not now debate if that idea is fudge;
 Besides, in point of brain, ourselves we often judge
 By length of beard and how you're dressed;

We only know

They voted then and there,

That only long-tailed mice upon this Board should sit.

And those poor mice who had no tail to show,
 Even though they lost those tails in open combat fair, –
 As this was still a proof of want of wit,

Or want of care, –

All these the Board must needs refuse,
 Lest in such company themselves their tails should
 lose.

Well, all was soon arranged: they wrote and called the
 meeting

To gather at the twilight hour;
 And in the barn that holds the flour

The Chairman starts the sitting.

They'd hardly settled down – I'm blest,
 A tail-less rat was sitting with the rest!

At this a junior nudged a neighbour near,
 An old white-whiskered mouse,
 And whispered him in tone most serious:
 'Now, how's that tail-less creature got in here?
 What's happened to that law, I say?
 Call up the ushers! Bid them drive that rat away!
 You know, with tail-less mice our people can't be doing;
 Do you suppose that rat will help the slightest bit?
 Why, even to keep his tail, he could not find the wit;
 It is not only us, the Board of State he'll ruin.'
 'Hush,' said the elder mouse, 'I know! But make no sign!
 That tail-less rat's a friend of mine.'

THE MILLER

VII. 2

ONCE through the Miller's dam the water worked its way.
 At first it did no harm to mention,
 If only dealt with straight away;
 The Miller was too slack, and gave it no attention.
 But day by day the leak was harder to repair;
 As from a pail, the water ran.
 Now, Miller, don't stand mooning there!
 Wake up and use your wits, my man!
 'Oh no,' my Miller says. 'There's nothing there to heed;
 'Tis not an ocean that I need;
 As far as water goes, I wish my mill no richer.'
 He leaves it there to run;
 The water pours as from a pitcher
 Until at last the mischief's done.
 The mill stops work, and fixed the mill-stone stands.
 The Miller's grasped it now; he groans and wrings his hands
 And racks his brain a remedy to seek.
 Well, while he's at the dam, examining the leak,

A hen, he notices, a drink of water steals;
 'You dirty brutes,' he cries. 'You tufted imbeciles,
 Without your help, I'm running out of water
 And here you come, and run me even shorter.'
 He takes his stick and gives his fowls no quarter.
 And what a way, to set things right!
 No fowls, no water, when he goes to bed that night!

And testify I can
 I've seen this kind of gentleman;
 In fact, I made this tale, to suit his special taste;
 On any kind of trash, a hundred pounds he'll waste,
 And thinks he saves the money that he spends,
 By keeping close on candle ends;
 On such particulars, a little hell he raises;
 If that's the way you save, your friends it scarce amazes,
 When you and yours have gone to blazes.

BOULDER AND DIAMOND

VII. 3

A DIAMOND got lost and lay upon the ground;
 This stone by chance a merchant found:
 The merchant to his Sovereign sold
 The gem;
 The King he had it cased in gold
 And wore it as the pride of all his diadem.
 A boulder heard of this, it made him quite excited;
 The thought of such a change his simple soul delighted;
 He saw a peasant pass, and stopped him on his way:
 'Here, countryman, I say!
 Do take me with you, when you go to town again!
 I'm eating out my heart, in all this mud and rain.

They say our diamond to fame has come!
 I cannot understand the reason, he's got on!
 He lay out here with me for all these summers gone;
 He's just a stone like me, and my old mate and chum.
 Now take me, do! It's certain as can be,
 They'll find some kind of job for me.'
 The peasant puts him at the bottom of his cart,
 And straight away for town they start.
 Our stone he tumbles in: 'Why, in the diadem,'
 Thinks he, 'They'll put me next my friend, the gem.'
 The turn it took was scarce the luck he thought to meet;
 'Tis true, he got a place; he went to mend the street.

SPENDTHRIFT AND SWALLOW VII. 4

A GAY young spark I knew,
 Who happened from his aunt great riches to inherit.
 He started squandering, and squandered with such spirit,
 That all his worldly wealth was I.O.U.
 He had a fine fur coat, still new;
 'Twas winter at the time,
 And old Jack Frost was in his prime.
 One day a swallow passed: what does our booby do,
 But pawn the fur as well! 'Why, aren't we all aware,
 You'll never see a swallow in the air,
 Till spring's in sight!
 So now,' thinks prodigal, 'my fur is useless quite.
 Why wrap oneself in furs? 'Tis now the first spring breezes
 To Nature's waking realm bring everything that pleases,
 And to the silent North the banished Frost takes wing.'
 Our friend is quick at reckoning;
 He only quite forgets – at least, until he sneezes,
 One swallow does not make the spring.

And so it proves! The frosts return again;
 The carts go creaking through the crumbled snow;
 The chimneys puff their smoke; on every window pane
 Delightful fairy tracings show.

Poor rake! His eyes with rheumy moisture flow;
 The little bird that spoke of summer days to follow,
 Lies frozen in the snow. He stands beside the swallow

And shakes, and holds his breath,

And mumbles through his teeth:

‘You villain, anyhow you’re finished too!

I thought that I could count on you!

To pawn my fur just now, – a pretty thing to do!’

THE YOUNG ROACH

VII. 5

I’m not at all a prophet,

But when I see a moth that flutters round a flame

I generally think, I’m somehow not far off it

In guessing he will burn his fingers at that game;

A lesson, friends, for you! For all will find the same, –

Grown man or little child, deny it, if you’re able!

‘Is all your fable there?’ you ask me. Wait a bit!

That’s only just a baby fable;

The real one’s coming after it.

That’s just the moral of my meditations.

There! In your eyes I now see new preoccupations;

At first – too short and now, unless I’m wrong,

You fear it will be long.

Well, what is there to do, dear friend? Have patience!

That’s what I fear myself!

But how can it be helped? I’ll soon be on the shelf.

The autumn rain goes pitter-patter;

Old folks are oft inclined to chatter;

But if you want me still, my story's thread to hold,
Please, hear me out! Now, this is what I'm told:
To make our little faults seem very small,

We put them easily away,

And even say,

What harm in that? A joke, that's all!

But what's at first a joke, leads onward to your fall;

A habit it becomes – a passion too, at length, –

A passion urging on to vice with giant strength,

That never lets you find your feet at all.

The plainer to discern,

To what sad end self-confidence may turn, –

Please let me offer you a story that I know;

Now really from my pen the fable's self will flow,

And well for you its lesson if you learn!

Beside a stream – the name has gone out of my head –

Those villains of the realm of waters,

The fishers, had set up their quarters.

And up beside the bank, from out the murky bed

A lively little roach would pop,

Extremely spry and very artful,

A most high-mettled roach, with courage by the cartfull;

All round about the hooks she'd circle like a top;

His trade the fisherman would curse in sheer vexation.

In patience long he waits the prize of his vocation:

He casts: – upon the float his eye is fastened firm;

'I've got you now,' thinks he; his heart is in a quiver;

He strikes – and what is there? A hook without a worm!

She seems to laugh at him, this versatile deceiver.

She takes his bait, and scurries down the river!

Outwitted fisherman is left to squirm.

'You hark to me,' exclaimed her brother, swimming near;

'You're in for trouble, sister dear;

Or are we all so cramped for room,
 That round the hooks you're buzzing all day long?
 I fear, we'll lose you soon, unless I'm very wrong.
 The closer to the hook, the nearer to your doom!
 To-day the trick succeeds; to-morrow who can say?
 But words of sense fall deaf on ears unwise.

'Come, come!' Our little roach replies:

'I know the time of day!

I know these fishers' tricks, so don't you fear for me!

Clean through their cunning I can see.

Ah! There's a pretty hook! And there – they've thrown
 another!

Oh gracious – more and more! Watch close, my little
 brother!

I'll lead these clever fools a dancel'

She darted for them, straight as bullet,

The first, the next she stripped – the third was in her gullet;

Alas! It was a sorry chance;

And in the end she learned, poor roach,

'Tis better far to fly at danger's first approach!

PEASANT AND SNAKE

VII. 6

NOT easily the world's respect attends

The man who chooses ill acquaintances and friends.

A peasant once got friendly with a snake.

We're all aware the snake is clever;

She soon contrived such friends with him to make:

He swore by her alone, and praised her up for ever.

Well! Now of all his old acquaintances and kin,

There's not a soul, that ever steps his way,

'What's this?' says he. 'I beg you, say,

Why is it, none of you drop in?

Has wife not entertained you as she should?
 Or are you weary of my simple food?
 'Oh no!' says Father Mat. 'It's not that way!
 With you we're glad to spend the day,
 And none of us you've grieved or vexed in any way, -
 Not one that wouldn't say so, I'll be bound!
 But where's the pleasure, do you find
 If, while one sits with you, one's always looking round,
 For fear your friend creep up and sting one from behind?'

PIG UNDER THE OAK

VII. 7

A SWINE, beneath an ancient oak,
 Upon the acorns gorged and stuffed all day,
 Then in the shadow snoring lay;
 At last with heavy eyes he woke,
 Got up, and with his snout began the roots to poke.
 'Why, don't you see? That hurts the tree,'
 A raven, on a bough, called out reproachfully.
 'If you lay bare the roots, you'll make the tree decay.'
 Says Swine: 'Well, let it; as for me,
 That won't disturb me any way.
 It's not much use, that I can see,
 And if it went for good, I'd never fret for that;
 It's acorns that I want; it's they that make me fat.'
 'Ungrateful one!' the oak replies in tone severe;
 'If you could raise your snout and look up here,
 Why then, my friend, you'd see,
 That all these acorns grow on me.'

The ignorant are just as blind;
 They mock at knowledge, scoff at learning,
 With scorn the toils of study spurning,
 Forgetting, they enjoy its fruits of every kind.

YOUR cleverness I place but low,
 However much folks stare at it,
 Unless there's some one you can benefit.

A merchant put some bales of cloth on show;
 Now that's the kind of goods that's always sure to go;
 This merchant could not say that trade was slow;
 The public thronged; he scarce could check the rush;
 At times it was a perfect crush!
 A spider saw how quick the merchant's goods were bought;
 The envious creature thought:
 How nice to find one's profits swelling;
 He'd catch the market's taste, no doubt;
 He meant to cut that merchant out,
 And on the window-sill himself start selling.
 He soon set out his warp, sat up all night to weave;
 He made a splendid show outside,
 Then sat him down, puffed up with pride.
 His shop he would not dare to leave;
 'That's good! As soon as it is day,' thinks he,
 'I'm sure those customers will all come round to me!
 Day comes. But oh how sad! Our genius and his shop,
 With just one stroke of mop,
 Drop;
 Our spider's nearly mad with spite:
 'Now there!' says he, 'there's none get treated right;
 Ask all the world, say I; which web is knit more fine,
 The merchant's cloth or mine?'
 'Why, yours: I'm happy to inform you,'
 The busy bee replies. 'We knew that long ago;
 But where's its use, I want to know?
 It does not clothe, it does not warm you.'

FOX AND ASS

VII. 9

‘GOOD day, my learned friend, and where may you have been?’

Said Reynard, meeting with the Ass.

‘Oh, by the lion’s cave I chanced to pass;
His strength has vanished: such a change I’ve seldom seen;
Time was when, if he roared, the forest groaned all round;

Then off in headlong flight I’d bound,
To get away from him as quickly as I could;
But now he’s weak and worn; his strength is gone;
His time draws on.

He lies inside his cave like any log of wood.

Believe me, not a beast

But showed he did not fear him in the least!
For all outstanding scores, they hastened to reward him;
For each who passed the cave, ’twas settling day;
Each settled in his favourite way:

One bit him, and one gored him.’

‘But you yourself,’ said Fox, ‘even though the lion’s ill,
I’m sure you showed some reverence still!’

‘You seem to think I’m dirt!
Pray, why should I hold back? I kicked him with a will!
I made him feel how asses’ hoofs can hurt!’

The base, when you have power and praise,
Scarce dare their envious eyes to raise;
But when you’re fallen from your height,
’Tis they that show the greatest spite.

FLY AND BEE

VII. 10

ONE spring, beside the garden walk,
In gentle breeze, a fly on slender stalk

Was swaying. To a bee
 That sucked a flower hard by, says she
 In patronising tone: 'You must be bored, I say,
 To work from morn to night each blessed day!
 'Twould kill me in an hour, if I exchanged with you.

Now, take this life of mine!
 'Tis simply paradise divine.
 I've never anything to do
 But pay a call, attend a ball!
 The finest houses in the town,
 The rich, the great, I know them all!
 Oh, if you only saw the dinners I get down!
 At wedding feast, at birthday party,
 I come as early as I please,
 On finest porcelain plates I sit and dine so hearty,
 From shining crystals quaff the choicest vintages.

Before the earliest guest,
 Of every dainty dish, I just pick out the best.
 I also like the softer sex;
 I buzz all round the pretty creatures,
 Or take a nap upon their features,
 Upon their rosy cheeks, or on their snow-white necks.'
 'I know of that,' says Bee; 'that may be how it strikes
 you,

But I have heard an ugly rumour,
 Which says, there's not a soul that likes you,
 That flies at feasts put all men out of humour,
 That often, when you scarce have passed the window
 frame,

You're driven out again with shame!
 'The window? Driven out?' says Fly. 'Well, where's the
 bother?
 They chase me out of one, I fly into another.'

BENEATH a log, a snake lay low,
 And nursed his hate for all creation;
 He had no other occupation;
 He simply hated; nature made him so.
 A lamb had strayed that way, to frisk and sport and spring;
 He knew not of the snake; he had not thought of him!
 The murderer creeps up, and plunges in his sting.
 Poor lamb! In those young eyes, the lovely sky grows
 dim:

The poison sets his blood aflame.
 With dying breath, he asks where he's to blame.
 'Who knows? It may have been, you came this way,
 To crush me with your hoof,' hissed out the snake;
 "'Tis for precaution that your life I take.'
 'Oh no!' the lamb replied; 'twas all he had time to say.

Some folks' minds are fashioned so;
 No love, no friendship can they know;
 Simply hating all mankind,
 In every living soul an enemy they find.

POT chummed with Kettle, and right dearly did he love him;
 'Tis true, in point of birth, his comrade was above him;
 But what is that with friends? His chum let no one hurt him,
 And Pot, he swore, he'd ne'er desert him.
 Not either of the friends his mate could bear to leave;
 You'd find them arm-in-arm from morning on till eve,
 To part them on the fire, made each one grieve:

So on the hob, or off the hob,
 They still were at it, hob-a-nob.
 Now Kettle had the wish to travel far and wide,
 And asked his friend to share the trip.
 Our Pot was much too keen to let the offer slip.
 He jumps into the cart; he sits by Kettle's side;
 The happy friends set out across the bumping cobbles,
 They jolt and jostle, as their carriage wobbles.
 Those ruts and rents and bumps and gaps
 For Kettle are a jest, for Pot may spell collapse.
 Each jolt upon the road gives Pot a new sensation;
 That does not mean at all, he'd change his situation;
 Clay Pot is brimming with elation,
 To think he's intimate with Iron Kettle.
 I cannot say, what lands they travelled o'er;
 On one point only, I took pains my doubts to settle:
 The Kettle came back sound and in the finest fettle,
 The Pot, when he got home, was potsherds and no more.

My fable's plain for all to see:
 In love and friendship, don't forget equality.

WILD GOATS

VII. 13

A SHEPHERD found wild goats, one winter in a cave,
 With tears of joy to heaven his hearty thanks he gave;
 'How splendid!' he exclaims. 'I need no other treasure;
 My flock itself will now be double measure.
 'Tis short I'll sleep, 'tis short I'll dine,
 Until these pretty goats have learned to feed with mine.
 I'll flourish like a lord in all our forest great;
 You see, a shepherd's flock is like a squire's estate;

Each day he sees his tribute swell;
 In piles, the cheese and butter rise,
 And now and then he takes a hide as well;
 'Tis only food that he supplies,
 And every shepherd keeps his winter stock of hay.
 The fodder of his sheep on these wild goats he presses,
 He pets them and caresses,
 He's with them fifty times a day,
 And thinks of every way to tame their mettle.
 This means less fodder for his own;
 Well, what of that? Leave them alone!
 It's easy with your own to settle.
 Just throw them each a wisp of hay,
 And if they come for more, then teach them sense, I say:
 Persuade them to be less intrusive.
 The mischief was: as soon as spring was come –
 Back to their mountain side, went off those goats elusive,
 For life without their rocks seemed anything but home.
 Meanwhile, the sheep began to fail,
 Till few were left to tell the tale;
 And shepherd, of his sheep bereft,
 Had nothing left.
 And he had thought this spring would bring all kinds of
 good.
 Friend shepherd, let me tell you what!
 On stranger goats don't waste your food;
 But keep your care for those that you have got!

NIGHTINGALES

VII. 14

A MAN with nets, one spring,
 Caught several nightingales, and carried them away;
 Each bird, when safely caged, struck up some kind of lay.

'Twas scarce as if they roamed in freedom through the
wood;

Imprisoned in a cage, does singing seem much good?

But what was there to do? They had to sing -

From boredom, from distress.

Now, one poor songster of his sad estate

Most felt the bitterness

For he, alas, was parted from his mate.

On him most hard the bondage lies;

Still fieldward through the bars he strains his eyes;

He mopes all night, all day;

But soon, 'Cheer up!' says he, 'to mope will never pay;

'Tis only fools that weep at troubles,

The wise his wit redoubles,

To find the way to put things right;

And I, to mend my fate, have got the means in sight.

Of course they never brought us here to eat;

Good music, I can see, is Master's favourite treat;

Then if he finds my song gives pleasure to his ear,

Perhaps in recompense, my cruel lot he'll cheer,

Unbar my cage, and end my miseries?'

'Twas so he thought! And in this hope he chanted;

He honoured with his song the sunset's glowing dyes,

With song he hailed the hour, when sunrise tints the
skies;

But did that bring him what he wanted?

Alas, he made his lot more cruel and more trying;

For those who failed their work to do,

Their master soon unbarred both cage and window too,

And sent those sorry songsters flying.

With my poor bird, it was not so.

The sweeter that his ditties flow,

The more they will not let him go.

A DIRTY broomstick came to high estate:
 No more the kitchen floor he early swept, and late;
 They gave him master's coats, to beat them out:
 (The servants were in drink, no doubt.)
 Our broom came sweeping through the air;
 He went for master's clothes, until the hall resounded;
 He punched the overcoats, as if 'twere corn he pounded;
 And certainly, his zeal he did not spare.
 The mischief was – himself! So greasy, stained and soiled,
 What good he did, you well can guess!
 The more he cleaned the clothes, the more the clothes were
 spoiled.

And I should say, you'll find the mess
 No less,
 When going off his beat, some fool of no discerning
 Imagines he'll correct the works of men of learning.

PEASANT AND SHEEP

VII. 16

A PEASANT brought a sheep to trial.
 The majesty of law he called in full array;
 The Fox was on the Bench; they started straight away
 The plaintiff's evidence, the sheep's denial,
 For each in detail to submit his case,
 With all the proofs, and what took place.
 The peasant says: 'Upon the tenth of May,
 When I went out to work, two fowls could not be
 found;
 The feathers and the bones were lying on the ground;
 And no one but the sheep was in the yard that day.'

The sheep says in defence she slept the whole night through
 And calls the neighbours round to witness too
 That never to her count was any charge preferred
 Of thieving

Or deceiving:

That never in her life she tasted beast or bird.

And here's the Fox's judgment, word for word: -

'The pleas the sheep puts in, we find, are out of place;
 Skill in removing every trace

Has always been a feature of the vicious;

The evidence has proved that on the tenth of May

The sheep and fowls were never far away,

And fowls are most delicious;

All the conditions were propitious;

Then, judging on my conscience, I decide,

She could not, as is shown,

Have left those fowls alone.'

The sheep's condemned to death. Be sentence straight
 applied!

The meat remains in Court; the plaintiff takes the hide.

THE MISER

VII. 17

A FAIRY once possessed a valuable treasure,
 Hid deep beneath the ground; when orders came to hand,
 Straight from the demon in command,
 To make a distant flight, far over sea and land;
 And work's like that, you know; they don't consult your
 pleasure,

And orders must be carried out.

My fairy was in great distress and doubt:

How, while he's gone, his treasure to secure:

Who'll guard it safe and sure?

To hire a man to watch, – 'neath lock and key to keep, –
 That kind of thing is not done cheap.

Or leave it as it is – you well may lose your cash;
 Each hour you'll fear there's something funny:
 They dig it up! The chest they smash! –

Men's eyes are sharp for money.

He puzzled long, then saw what he should do.

It chanced he had for host a skinflint and a screw;

With all his wealth, he seeks the miser ere he starts,

And says: 'Dear host, it's just to-day I knew

I've got to leave my home, and go to foreign parts.

I've always had a happy time with you;

As parting gift from friend to friend,

I hope you won't refuse to accept my little treasure!

Eat, drink and take your pleasure;

These sovereigns freely spend;

When death shall free from every care,

Then I shall be your only heir;

No other terms I crave;

And as for that, I hope you'll long defy the grave.'

He speaks, he's off. There pass ten years, another ten;

The elf performs his task, and then –

Sweet home again,

And fatherland so fair.

Oh joyful sight! The key in dying clutch still pressed,

The miser, dead of hunger on the chest,

And all the sovereigns therel

The fairy slipped the key

From fingers shrunk and starving,

And glad indeed of heart was he,

A guardian to have found, who never cost a farthing.

If miser hugs his gold while waking and while sleeping,
 Then can't a fairy trust a treasure to his keeping!

A POET brought a plaint against a millionaire,
 And prayed to Zeus to take his side;
 Zeus summoned both, to have the question tried.
 The two appeared; one lean and spare,
 In shabby clothes, with shoes untied;
 The other choked with gold, and puffed and swelled with
 pride.

‘Have pity on me, Zeus! Olympus’ Lord and Master!
 Cloud Chaser! Lightning Caster!

Oh say,’ the poet pleads, ‘for what offence I pay,
 That from my childhood up, in bitter stress I groan! –
 No fuel, not a spoon, and all the wealth I own

My phantasy alone!

And fares my rival so? Ah nay!

With no more mind or heart than thine own wooden
 idol,

Surrounded by his court of worshippers each day,
 He bursts with fat, in pampered life and idle!’

‘And this,’ said Zeus, ‘to you seems nothing worth,
 That centuries from now, your songs will echo yet?’

But him, when back he goes to earth, –
 Posterity apart, – his grandsons will forget.

Just think! ’Twas you that chose that fame should make
 you great;

The comforts of this earth, I’ve made his life estate.

Ah no, if he could form a truer estimate,

And if ’twere possible with such a mind as his

To feel, compared with you, how poor and mean he
 is,

Then he, much more than you, might grumble at his
 fate.’

AN old grey wolf one day
 Dragged to a quiet nook a sheep that he had tackled –
 Alas! No friendly call to pay; –
 He tore the poor thing up, and then the greedy glutton
 With such a will attacked his mutton,
 The bones against his grinders crackled.
 But greedy as he was, he could not finish all;
 So, supper put aside, stretched out in easy sprawl,
 He lay, like alderman who's dined too well.
 That moment it befell,
 A mouse that lived next door, attracted by the smell,
 Came crawling furtively past anthill, moss and bole,
 Picked up a tiny dole
 And, making straight for home, soon vanished in his hole.
 When wolf espies this larceny,
 He gives the woods no peace.
 He bellows: 'Robbery! Police!
 Stop thief! I'm ruined! Oh dear me,
 They're taking all my property!'

Just such a sight as this, I chanced in town to see;
 A thief took Jones's watch – he's Justice of the Peace;
 And Jones was shouting: 'Robbers! Help! Police!'

'GOOD morning, Master Tom!' – 'Good morning, Master
 Will!
 'Well, well, how wags the world with you, old chap?'
 'Ah! friend, of my mishap

I see you haven't learnt;
 I'm punished for my sins; my little farm is burnt,
 Burnt to the ground, and I go houseless still.'
 'What! burnt? That's sorry kind of play.'
 'Well, yes; we'd met, you see, to dine on Christmas
 Day;
 I went to feed the horse, took candle from the shelf,
 When something in my noddle rumbled,
 The light I somehow fumbled,
 It tumbled,
 And though I got away myself,
 Both house and stables blazed and crumbled.
 But you yourself -' 'Oh Tom, I too am humbled
 For all my sins and scarce keep dragging on;
 You see, my legs are gone,
 It's just a miracle that still I'm here.
 I too at Christmas time had gone to fetch some beer;
 I own that with my friends I too had had a bout;
 And as a drop too much
 May make a light a dangerous thing to touch,
 I thought I'd put the candle out.
 But some one in the dark, some evil fiend, no doubt,
 Tripped up my legs as down I ran
 And left me only half a man,
 So here I am, a cripple.'
 'Well, if you'll tittle,
 You've only got yourselves to blame,'
 Says worthy Father James: 'in fact you're both the same;
 And I myself don't wonder
 That you have burnt your house, and you your crutches
 curse;
 A drunkard with a light may blunder,
 And in the dark may blunder worse.'

THERE lived a starling in a cage,
 As songster, not at all the rage,
 But as a thinker, truly great!
 He and the kitten were most intimate;
 This kitten was a full-sized Tom already,
 But meek and mild, and very steady.
 Well, once the cats' meat man forgot the daily ration.
 Poor kit, he wants his meat;
 He wanders round and round, his empty maw to
 cheat,
 And gently whisks his fluffy tail,
 And mews a plaintive wail;
 Chance for a little dissertation.
 'My friend,' the starling says, 'You *are* a simple cat,
 To go without your meals like that;
 A goldfinch in a cage just underneath your nose!
 Yes, you're an honest cat, one knows,
 But conscience? –
 You haven't seen the world, it's clear;
 I tell you, that's all nonsense;
 It's only feeble minds that conscience fills with fear;
 For folks like you and me, it's nonsense – sheer.
 Whate'er they do, the strong,
 Can't possibly be wrong;
 And here's another proof, and here's a telling case.'
 Thus, reasoning with vigour and with grace,
 The lore of all the Ancients he employed;
 Our little hungry kit that lesson quite enjoyed;
 He got the goldfinch down, and ate it.
 But though he found the morsel very nice,
 As for his appetite, he did no more than whet it;
 But Kitty took his lesson twice,

And great success his studies followed;
He said to Dr. Starling: 'Yes, you're right:
I think I understand you quite,'
And breaking through the cage, his kind professor
swallowed.

TWO DOGS

VII. 22

A FAITHFUL farmyard hound,
That served his master well the whole year round,
A long-lost friend espied with joy;
It was the curly spaniel Toy,
On downy cushion soft in window niche reclining.
As if it were a sister he had found,
He almost weeps for joy, and pining, whining,
Against the wall he scratches and he scrambles,
And wags his tail and gambols.
‘Well, Toy dear, tell me how you fare
Since Master took you in, to live with him up there?
Out here we often starved, you’ve not forgotten how;
Say, what’s the job you’re doing now?’
‘Twere wicked to complain,’ says Toy;
‘I’m sure I’m Master’s only joy;
I live in luxury and state;
I eat and drink off silver plate,
And play on Master’s lap, and when that fancy’s gone,
The sofa and the floor are nice to roll upon.
What’s happening with you?’ ‘I’ says the honest hound –
His tail was hanging limp, his muzzle near the ground;
‘I’m just as used to cold, as when we both were younger, –
And hunger;
And over Master’s house still keeping guard,
I sleep and drench with rain out yonder in the yard;

And when I bark, I get a kick,
 Or else the stick!
 But how did you on such good fortune fall,
 You, who are only weak and small,
 While I slave out my soul, and all in vain?
 Say, what's your job?' 'My job! That's good! Say that
 again!'
 Cries little Toy, and sniggles up her jaws;
 'I walk on my hind paws.'

And many a fortune had no other cause!
 The man could only walk on his hind paws.

CAT AND NIGHTINGALE

VII. 23

A CAT once caught a nightingale,
 Put out her claws, and murmured in his ear,
 With just a gentle squeeze that made the poor thing quail:
 'Now, Nightingale, my little dear,
 I hear that folks extol your singing everywhere,
 Your music with the very best compare.
 Friend Fox's word won't go for nought;
 He said you have a voice, so wondrous sweet and thrilling,
 That all who've heard your lovely trilling,
 Shepherd or shepherdess, are quite distraught.
 I'd like so much myself, I thought,
 To hear you sing.
 Don't tremble so, my friend, and don't get wrong with me!
 You think I want to eat you? No such thing.
 Just sing to me, - that's all. I mean to set you free,
 To rove about the woods, and fly from tree to tree!
 Of music, you must know, I'm just as fond as you;
 To purr myself to sleep, is what I love to do!'

But no. Poor bird, he shook so much,
 He scarce could breathe in Pussy's clutch.
 Says Puss, 'I'm waiting. Well, what's wrong?
 Do sing, my dear, — one little song.'
 But Birdie could not sing, he only squeaked in fright.
 'So that's what gave the forest such delight!'
 Said Pussy, with a mocking snigger.
 'Now, where's that purity and vigour
 Of which the woods eternally are talking?
 Why, even from my kits, I wouldn't stand such squawking!
 Oh no, my hopes of song, it's clear, were quite misplaced!
 Let's see, if in my mouth you leave a nicer taste.'
 And our poor songster vanished in her jaws.

Lean closer, and I'll breathe the burden of my tale:
 Faint comes the song of nightingale
 In Pussy's claws.

FISHES DANCING

VII. 24

THE Lion, having 'neath his sway
 Not only woods but waters, spake the wish,
 That all the beasts should meet one day,
 And choose a deputy to rule the fish.
 As law requires, they took the votes all round;
 The Fox had got the most, they found;
 So Master Fox in seat of judgment sat;
 The Fox got visibly more fat.
 He had a trusty chum, a simple countryman;
 The two worked out a little plan;
 While Fox in judgment sits, to try, convict, condemn,
 His chum assists by hooking them;
 And then the judge and he together take their tea.
 But 'tis not every day, that rogues get off scot-free.

Strange rumours reached their King, and raised suspicion
That magistrates of his true judgment did not weigh;

So choosing a convenient day,
To inspect his realm himself, he made an expedition.
He came along the bank; the simple rustic wight
Had caught a pile of fish, and got a fire alight;

For self and partner he prepared good cheer;
The fishes in the fire jumped high, as well they might;
Each skipped to see his end so near,
With gaping mouth and starting eyes.

‘Who’s that?’

What are you at?’

The wrathful lion cries;

‘Your Gracious Majesty,’ the fox makes answer quick –
(Our Fox against the worst, has always got some trick)

‘Your Gracious Majesty,

Why, he’s chief secretary here to me.
By his integrity he’s won all-round esteem;
And these are little carp, all dwellers in the stream;

We’re all come here to-day,
To welcome our good King, if he should pass this way.’
‘And are my folk content? And is true judgment given?’
‘Your Gracious Majesty, they say it’s simply heaven,
If but your precious life could last their full desire!’
But in the frying-pan the fish keep leaping higher.

‘Then, tell me why on earth,’ the lion asks, advancing,
‘They twist their tails about, and wag their heads so
queerly?’

‘Oh most wise Lion,’ says the Fox, ‘they’re dancing, –
For joy because they see the King they love so dearly.’
Of bare-faced lies like this, their King would stand no more,
And, as to music you can dance more featly,

The secretary and the governor

He clawed until they sang most sweetly.

SOME critics, if they're friends with you, -
 Then you're the greatest light, that critics ever knew;
 But there are others still, -
 Sing sweetly as you will,
 Not only don't expect from them the poet's bays,
 They're quite afraid to own there's anything to praise.
 I hardly think they'll thank me for my pains,
 But this small tale my view of them explains.

One day in church the preacher,
 In point of eloquence 'twas Plato was his teacher, -
 Was heartening his flock to all that's good and true;
 Each sentence from his lips fell soft and sweet as dew;
 One felt that truth unfeigned in every word was thrilling;
 As by a golden chain

He lifted up to heaven each thought, each feeling;
 He showed how mean the world, with all its fancies vain.

Their pastor ends his exhortation,
 But each still listens, to the heavenly throne of Grace
 Borne upwards in a glow of inspiration,
 And hardly feels the tears upon his face.
 As from the house of God, the people streamed away,
 'A happy gift, I say!'

Said one to another, as they walked upon their way;
 'What sweetness and what fire!

How well he drew our hearts to every good desire!
 But neighbour, you, I think, - your heart must be of
 wood,

That all the time your eyes should never fill!
 Or did you understand?' 'Of course I understood;
 Shed tears for him? I never would,
 I'm from that parish on the hill.'

UNLESS you want to feel forlorn,
 Don't try to change the rank in which you're born,
 Nor with your betters force alliance.
 If Nature made you dwarf, – that's right;
 Don't go and stand among the giants
 And fancy that you're twice the height!

Once, sticking in her tail some peacock-feathers bright,
 A crow went proudly to the peacocks strutting,
 And quite imagined that her kin
 And former friends were taken in,
 Their eyes upon her beauty glutting!
 She thought the peacocks would escort
 Their new-found sister home: in short, –
 She'd be an ornament of great Queen Juno's court.
 And what was the result of this vain-glorious freak?
 The peacocks thronging round, of all her spoils bereft her;
 And when she made a dash and dodged each angry beak, –
 Of peacock's feathers not to speak, –
 'Twas little of her own they left her.
 She tried to join the crows, – they knew her not
 Because she looked so strange, and not a soul befriended;
 They plucked what feathers still she'd got
 And that was how her folly ended;
 Poor thing! She'd ceased to be a crow,
 But was she peacock? Oh dear no!

With just a little tale my fable I will match.
 A pleasant thought occurred to grocer's daughter, Flo.
 Thought she: 'I fancy I'm a catch;
 Full fifty thousand pounds a pretty sum!'
 They married honest Flo to Lord Tom Thumb.

And what? Her husband's friends all teased her to satiety;
 'Her father was in trade! The height of impropriety!'
 Her sisters called her snob, for joining high society.

So there she was, poor, honest Flo,
 No peacock and no crow.

Book VIII

KING LION, terror of the wood,
 Was stricken with old age and lost his strength.
 His claws no longer gripped; by now were gone for good
 Those fangs, whose menace once no enemy withstood:
 His faltering footsteps scarce could draw their weary length;
 But ah! Far worse than all,
 The neighbours, – now his wrath no longer could appal, –
 For every rankling wrong that in the past they bore him
 All vied in vicious haste to heap new insults o'er him.
 Here Horse's spurning hoof its driving blow has borne;
 Here Wolf's red fangs have torn;
 There Ox has thrust his piercing horn.
 Poor Lion in his last distress
 Awaits the bitter end, when spite can do no more,
 And only shows his bitterness
 With low and mournful roar;
 But when he sees the Ass is puffing out his chest,
 To give his kick with all the rest,
 And waiting but to choose the place that most will smart,
 'Ye Gods,' the Lion cries, appealing through his groans,
 'Before this shame shall touch my dying bones,
 Send swift the only end that's meet for Lion heart!
 Let Death his sharpest pains prepare,
 An insult from an Ass is harder far to bear!'

LION, CHAMOIS AND FOX

VIII. 2

A LION through the thickets chased
 A chamois, and was close upon him;
 His greedy eyes he fastened on him;
 He saw a dinner to his taste.

There seemed no chance for Chamois to escape,
 For yawning at their feet, a gully lay agape;
 But Chamois, light of foot, stretched every nerve and
 leapt –

And, like an arrow from a bow,
 Across the precipice he swept,
 Then from a crag beyond gazed backward on his foe.

My Lion stopped the chase.
 It happened that a friend was roaming near that place;
 This friend was Master Fox.

‘What! With your strength,’ says he, ‘Your quickness and
 your ease,

At Lion’s might a feeble chamois mocks!
 ’Tis wonders you could do at any time you please!
 Why, if you really wished, although the chasm is wide,

You’d take it in your stride;
 You know, I am your friend; I tell you true;
 To gamble with your life, is what I would not do,
 Unless I knew

How strong you are, how light of tread.’
 These taunts and flatteries fired the lion’s head;
 He gathered for the spring; he leapt – Alas!
 The yawning chasm was more than he could pass
 And, falling headlong, he was smashed to pieces.

Then tell me what his trusty friend did;
 Fox very gingerly the slope descended,
 And seeing, for the King’s commands, caprices,

Respect no more was needed,
 With none that hindered, none that heeded,
 Began the funeral then and there,
 And ere the month was gone, had picked his comrade
 bare.

A FARMER sowed some oats upon his land;
 A young horse watched him as he went,
 And argued, in his discontent:
 'A pretty business, Sir, with all these oats on hand!
 They say that men are far more wise than we,
 But is there anything more stupid you could see!
 To dig a field all day you swelter;
 Then on it, helter-skelter,
 You simply throw your oats away.
 Now if he dealt them out to me or to the bay!
 Or even to the fowls, – well, then there's some defence,
 I own that even that has got some kind of sense;
 Or if he locked them up, I'd say that that was mean;
 But throw them all away – such folly ne'er was seen.'
 Meanwhile when autumn came, these oats were harvested;
 'Twas there the farmer found his horse's daily bread.

This horse's argument, no doubt,
 My reader will not fail to scout.
 And yet, from ancient times to our own generation,
 'Tis even so that man would flout
 The will Divine that rules creation,
 And cannot in his ignorance appraise
 The goodness of its ends, the wisdom of its ways.

SQUIRREL¹

VIII. 4

THE squirrel was the lion's page;
 What work he did, you need not ask;
 He made the lion pleased, and, this I can engage,
 To make the lion pleased is not an easy task.

¹ This fable should properly change places with IX. 2.

They promised him a load of walnuts on a truck;
 They promise, but meanwhile the years go swiftly by;
 Our little man, half-starved and down upon his luck,
 Can only grind his teeth, and cry.
 Just look! High up above on every side he sees
 His tiny friends go flitting through the trees.
 He blinks at them so piteously, but they
 Their nuts complacently keep crunching and keep crunching
 And munching, and munching.
 Our little squirrel moves a step that way: –
 Nay! Nay!
 It may not be;
 They call him, push him back to serve the lion's tea,
 Or else the lion hasn't finished lunching.
 Our squirrel in the end got old and slow.
 The lion tired of him; 'twas time to let him go.
 Our squirrel then was duly pensioned;
 They brought to him the truck of nuts I mentioned.
 These nuts were splendid; none could beat them, –
 All choice ones, nut for nut as good as could be,
 And only one thing not quite as it should be: –
 The squirrel had no teeth to eat them.

PIKE

VIII. 5

A CHARGE against the Pike was made
 Of wronging all the fishy tribe;
 A cartload of complaints they laid,
 And next the accused, as legal forms prescribe,
 Brought in a bucket, wriggling, into court.
 The magistrates, in company,
 Were grazing in a field hard by;
 You'll find them named in full in the report!

Two asses' names you'll see,
 And two old nags, and goats just two or three.
 That justice should in nought miscarry,
 The Court appointed Fox as secretary;
 And some one – don't believe a word –
 Said Pike supplied the fish for Doctor Fox's board.
 Well, none could blame the fairness of the trial, –
 Which means to say that Jacky's tricks
 Were plain beyond denial.
 The Justices went on, their sentence thus to fix: –
 To deal the death of shame that is his due
 And hang him on a bough, that such may see and rue;
 'Your Worships of the Bench,' the Fox puts in his nose:
 'To hang is not enough; I venture to propose
 A punishment unheard of, – strange and new! –
 That criminals henceforth may tremble and take heed,
 Let's drown him in the stream!' 'That's excellent indeed,'
 The magistrates exclaimed; and, being all agreed,
 Into the stream that pike they threw.

CUCKOO AND EAGLE

VIII. 6

THE Cuckoo got a job to act as nightingale;
 The Cuckoo in his new degree,
 Ensconced himself upon a tree;
 His vocal powers to all the vale
 He showed for their enjoying.
 He looks; the birds are flying off;
 Some of them laugh at him, and others even scoff!
 My Cuckoo finds it most annoying,
 And asks the King of Birds to make them all be good;
 'Excuse me, Eagle King, my just complaint for bringing;
 You made me nightingale for all this wood,
 And yet the birds are laughing at my singing.'

'My friend, I'm King of Birds, but not of Nature too,'
 The Eagle King replies, 'so here my power must fail.
 I may compel the birds to call you nightingale,
 But make a cuckoo nightingale is more than I can do.'

RAZORS

VIII. 7

WHILE posting on the road I met a Mr. Blake;
 At night we found an inn, and there we stopped to rest;
 Next morning I was scarce awake
 When, what is it I see? My friend seems quite distressed.
 We chatted and we joked before we bade good-night;
 I listen to him now - I think he's hardly right;
 He'll moan and then he'll sigh;
 Then give a little cry;
 'What's wrong?' I ask, surprised to see him so behaving;
 'You don't feel ill, I hope?' 'Why not at all! I'm shaving!'
 'Oh! Only that?' I rise; and there my curious friend
 Stands groaning by the glass with such a sour grimace,
 As if some wicked folks were going to flay his face.
 I grasped it in the end;
 'You plague yourself!' I cried; 'No wonder that you writhe;
 Look here: now say!
 That's not a razor, that's a common scythe;
 Don't try to shave with that! You'll hack your face away.'
 Says Blake, 'I don't deny
 My razor has no edge;
 That's clear enough to any eye!
 I want to save my skin! It's bluntness is my pledge.'
 'But I, my friend, would warn you most politely -
 The bluntest razor cuts you oftenest,
 The sharpest shaves you best;
 The thing you've got to do is, learn to use it rightly.'

And, judging men as I have found them,
 I've seen that many in this spirit
 Don't dare employ a man of merit,
 And so keep none but idiots around them.

FALCON AND WORM

VIII. 8

to lime-tree's topmost twig a worm had grappled fast,
 And in the wind was rocking;
 A falcon in the air, as overhead it passed,
 Could not refrain from mocking: –
 'Poor thing! What endless toil it must have cost! – And
 why?
 Whatever did you gain by crawling up so high?
 You've got no liberty! You can't do what you like,
 And with your twig you sway the way the wind may strike.'
 'Yes! You can well make sport,'
 The worm below replies: 'You fly so easily,
 Your wings will bear you far, and give you strong support.
 'Twas other merits Nature gave to me:
 To keep my hold up here, I own is rather tricky;
 There's only one thing helps: thank Heaven, I'm sticky!'

THE POOR RICH MAN

VIII. 9

'No point in being rich, I think,
 Unless you've dainty things to eat and drink;
 What use to keep your coins to chink?
 You die, and have to leave them all the same;
 You only plague yourself, and earn an ugly name.
 Now I, – if wealth had fallen to my share,
 Would never stint; I'd spend my thousands then and there,
 To live in pomp and pride;
 And by the feasts I'd give, they'd know me far and wide.

I'd do my neighbours good as well.
The miser's life must be a simple hell.'

So to himself a poor man said
In wretched hovel with a bench for bed –
When suddenly above his pillow leaned
Some say a sorcerer, and others say a fiend; –
The second is less likely to be wrong;
We'll find out better as we go along.

He stood, and thus began: 'You want some cash to spend,
I heard you saying. Well, I'm glad to serve a friend;
I've got this purse for you! One sovereign's there – no
more;

But when you take it out there's always one in store;
So now you see, my friend;
How rich you care to be, will on yourself depend.
Here! Take it! You will draw as many as you need,
Until you're quite content;
But take good heed!

On no account can one gold coin be spent,
Until into the stream the purse itself you've thrown:' –
The purse is in his hand: our poor man is alone.
At first his joy came near to wreck his self-command;
But when he found his wits, he took the purse in hand;
Indeed, he scarce could think he was not dreaming,
Out came a sovereign bright and gleaming.

He felt, – another coin was waiting for its turn.
'If only through the night the midnight oil I burn,'
So thinks our needy brother, –

'I'll take and take one sovereign on another;
To morrow, oh! how rich I'll be,
I'll live a life of luxury!'

Next morning, all the same, he modifies his plan,
'That's good so far,' he says; 'I'm now a wealthy man,
But why not get the most I can?

A SABRE blade, once keen and thrusting,
 Among a waste of iron rusting,
 On market-day was taken out
 And sold for nothing to a country lout.
 Our country friends are no great speculators;
 The peasant for his blade a use was quick to find;
 A handle he attached of simple rustic kind;
 With this he hacked the birch, to make his rustic
 gaiters;
 With this, some faggot he would chip to make a glim,
 Or clear a tree of twigs, or else his hedges trim,
 Or whittle garden stakes, to train his plants upon.
 No wonder, ere a year was gone,
 The blade was like a saw, with rust on every side;
 By now, upon its back astride
 The children loved to ride.
 A hedge-hog lay beneath the bed,
 Where some one threw the chopper too;
 One evening to the blade he said:
 'Why, if the sabre blade
 Is worth the fuss that's often made,
 What shame to trim the stakes, at rustic clown's desire,
 Or chop the faggots for the fire,
 And end the plaything of a child of two!
 'In some good soldier's hand, the foe I could contain,
 But here,' the blade replies, 'my talent is in vain!
 And so for menial tasks my services they claim;
 'Tis by compulsion too.
 He only is to blame,
 Who could not understand, what work I'm meant to
 do.'

'HERE, Tom, come here, my lad!
 Wherever have you gone? I want you here at once.
 Your uncle's not done bad!
 Now just you trade like me, and then you'll be no dunce.'
 To a nephew in his shop a merchant thus held forth;
 'You know that worn-out piece of Polish cloth,
 'Twas here for all these years, and never got a shake,
 Because it was so old and damp and full of moth.
 I've got it off my hands. I called it English make.
 Well, there you are! Just now, I took for that a hundred!
 The fellow was a goat!
 'Right, uncle,' answered Tom, a tickle in his throat;
 'But as to who's the goat, I've rather wondered;
 Look here! He's paid you with a forged Bank-note.'

Cheated! Himself a cheat! In trade 'tis no surprise.
 From shops and shopmen lift your eyes,
 On finer fortunes lodging;
 You'll find that even there the world is just the same,
 And nearly all are playing at one game, –
 At who can tell the smartest lies
 And who's the best at dodging.

CANNON AND SAILS

VIII. 12

ONCE on a ship amongst the cannon rose
 Against the sails contention keen.
 From every porthole there, stuck out an angry nosel
 Thus to the elements they vent their spleen: –
 'Ye Gods! And was it ever seen
 That some most despicable canvas rag
 Such high deserts as ours should claim with stupid brag!

In our hard-working life, what part have sails to show?

If once the wind begins to blow,

They puff their chests out – so!

Great lords they are, according to their notion, –

They soar so high and mighty o’er the ocean!

Their boasts are empty rattle;

’Tis we that roar in battle;

’Tis we that make our ship the monarch of the main;

’Tis we that carry death and terror in our train.

We will not go on living with the sails:

To manage for ourselves, our own resource avails.

Come flying to our aid, thou mighty Aquilo,

And tear these sails to rags, that all may know!’

The North Wind at their word came riding on the blast;

The sea grew dark and overcast;

Across the threatening sky, black storm-clouds trail their
flags;

The billows rise and break, like mountains in their height;

The thunder splits the ear; the lightning blinds the sight;

The North Wind ramps and roars and tears those sails to
rags!

’Twas done; the storm had passed away.

But now the ship whose sails were gone,

Of wind and waves became the sport and play;

Like helpless log, it drifted on;

And when it faced the foeman’s frown,

Whose broadside thundered fear and ruin too,

Our vessel could not move, was riddled through

And with its cannon, like a stone, went down!

A State that’s sound and strong,

Is like some vast machine, in which no organ fails;

Its army guards the sacred soil from wrong;

The shapers of its state-craft are the sails.

In public life, as oft we see,
The rogue must count on this! While poor and low his
station,
He may escape your observation;
But honours on a rogue are like a bell:
The sound they make goes far, and loud the tale they tell.

A RICH man lived in town; his name was Pop-a-Pop, -
 The name is not put in because the line runs lame;
 Oh no, this kind of man, it's not so bad to name; -

About this Pop-a-Pop,

Ill rumours would not stop;

And often there is much in neighbours' information. -

Folks said that he had stored a million in a casket,

Yet never gave relief to those that came to ask it.

Now, who would not prefer a pleasant reputation?

So wishing that their talk should take a different turn,

Good Pop-a-Pop gave all to learn,

That every Saturday he meant to feed the poor!

And truly anyone who passed his gate,

Could see he'd only got to walk in straight;

'Poor fellow!' People said: 'here's bankruptcy in store.'

Oh no, our screw had found a clever way: -

He let out spiteful dogs on leash each Saturday.

Small talk of meat or drink for any beggar calling!

Good luck if he got off without a mauling!

Meanwhile, good Pop-a-Pop, the people quite revere
 him;

All cry: 'Ah, Pop-a-Pop, like him you won't find many;

His only fault, if any, -

He has such nasty dogs, you hardly can get near him;

But he himself would share his only penny!

And that is often so, I find;

To certain rooms of State, the way is wondrous hard;

It's all the temper of the dogs on guard;

The Pop-a-Pops are very kind.

A FOX once asked a peasant:

‘Good neighbour, tell me do:

What makes your horse’s company so pleasant, –

That, as I see, he’s always out with you?

You keep him clean; he’s heaps to eat, I vow!

He’s with you on the road, and often at the plough.

Allow!

Compared with any other beast,

Of brains he almost has the least!’

‘Eh, neighbour, no! His brains I’d do without!’

The sturdy peasant cried. ‘My use for them is small;

My object is not that at all;

I want him just to carry me about

And answer to the knout!’

DOG AND HORSE

VIII. 16

WHILE both were working on the farm one day,

The horse’s job and his, Tray started to compare.

‘Now I should say,’ says he, ‘my fine great lady there,

Our master could afford to turn you right away.

A splendid thing to cart and plough!

In all your mighty deeds there’s nothing else, I vow!

There’s no comparison between the work we do;

Though I’m engaged all day, at night I’m working too!

By day I have in charge the sheep upon the mead,

And all night long the house I heed.’

‘Of course,’ replied the steed;

‘That’s very true indeed;

But still, if at the plough I did not work so hard,

Why, you might find yourself with nothing left to guard!’

OWL AND DONKEY

VIII. 17

A SIGHTLESS ass had lost his way;
 Our Scatter-brains had meant all round the world to stray,
 But reached so dense a thicket by the night,
 He could not move a yard to left or right;
 The task was hard enough for anyone with sight.
 By luck, he met an owl that lived not far away;
 This owl the right direction showed;
 We know at night, the owl has wondrous eyes;
 Ravine or hillock, fall or rise, –
 The owl saw everything, much clearer than by light;
 By dawn, both ass and owl had reached the open road.
 How could one part with such a useful guide?
 The donkey begs the owl to never leave his side;
 All round the world with him he wants to go!
 The owl felt wondrous fine,
 When seated on the donkey's spine;
 They started off; but did they prosper? No.
 As soon as o'er the east the Sun had spread his light,
 The vision of the owl grew dark as blackest night;
 But Owl was very obstinate!
 The donkey's way he wanted to dictate.
 'Look out!' he cries; 'A pool upon your right!'
 To left was a ravine; there was no pool in sight.
 'Left! More to left, I say! And further still!' –
 And Owl and Ass went rolling down the hill.

SNAKE

VIII. 18

A SNAKE asked Jupiter
 To grant her voice of nightingale,
 'And if you can't,' said she, 'my life seems poor and stale.
 On every side, where'er I stir,

The feeble folk and small,
 They all fight shy;
 And if they're stronger, why, -
 Thank heaven, if I get off at all!
 No! Such a life as that 'tis long enough I've stood.
 But if, like nightingale I carolled in the wood,
 Then, rousing all to admiration,
 I'd hope to win their love, perhaps their estimation;
 In fact, I'd be the soul of merry conversation!
 Great Jove was pleased to grant the snake this grace,
 And of her horrid hiss there was not left a trace.
 The serpent scaled a willow growing near;
 Like sweetest nightingale, she charmed the listening ear,
 And soon the birds all round had settled down to hear.
 But when they saw who sang, all fled without exception!
 Now, who would relish this reception?
 'Oh, really? Is my voice so odious?'
 Remarked the Snake, with anger pale.
 'Oh no!' the swallow said; 'Tis wondrously melodious:
 'Tis certainly as fine as any nightingale;
 But I must own our hearts went twittering,
 When you put out that ugly sting.
 We're all afraid to be so near.
 So please you won't be angry if I say:
 Your music is a joy to hear;
 But would you sing a hundred yards away?'

WOLF AND CAT

VIII. 19

out of the wood there dashed right past the village bounds
 A wolf - not on the prowl; fear quickened every stride;
 He ran in terror for his hide:
 The huntsmen pressed behind, and all the pack of hounds.

He'd turn in anywhere, – and glad enough of that;
 But what's so hard,
 Is this, that every gate is barred;
 Perched on the fencing of a yard,
 He spies a cat,
 And prays: 'Oh, won't you tell me, Thomas dear,
 Who is the kindest peasant here,
 To save me from my cruel foes? Alack!
 You hear the dreadful horns, the baying of the pack;
 It's me they're after!' 'I'd try Steve, if I were you;
 There's not a kinder man; yes, see what Steve will do!
 'Well, yes! but once I stole a sheep from him!'
 'Then I should have a try at Jim.'
 'I'm much afraid, Jim's angry with me too;
 I took his goat not long ago.'
 'Here! Turn in quick next door to Joe!'
 'To Joe? Oh no! I daren't; I'd tremble if I met him;
 Why, ever since last spring, he wants me for his lamb.'
 'That's bad! But wait a bit! You might have luck with Sam.'
 'Oh Tom, I took Sam's calf and ate him.'
 'So that's the way, my friend! Not one you've not offended,'
 Said Thomas to the trembling bully;
 'It's likely, isn't it, that here you'll be defended!
 No, no! Our peasants' heads are not so thick and woolly,
 Don't think they'll hurt themselves to save your game;
 Why should they? You've yourself to blame.
 'Tis mischief you have sown; now reap the same!'

BREAM

VIII. 20

A BASIN in a noble's park,
 'Neath fountain showering spark by spark,
 Was stocked with bream.
 Sporting beside the bank, one saw them dart and gleam;

It looked as if their life were one long golden dream.

But stay!

Their master in that tank put fifty pike one day.

‘Good heavens!’ A neighbour came to say,

‘Good heavens! Whatever are you doing?’

Pike with your bream to quarter in!

Why soon of all the bream, there won’t be left a fin!

Or don’t you know that pike spell ruin?’

‘You’re wasting words, ’twould seem,’

The noble answered with a smile; ‘That’s so!

But I should rather like to know,

What gave you the idea that I was fond of bream!’

WATERFALL AND BROOK VIII. 21

A FOAMING waterfall, midst boulders clattering,

Addressed in haughty tone a health-restoring spring;

The little fellow crept scarce visible below,

Yet had a saving strength, the world had learnt to know;

‘How strange! Though you’re so small – your waters
hardly flow –

You get the visitors of fashion and of wealth!

Now if they came to me, I’d see the reason why;

But why on earth to you?’ – ‘For health,’

The still Brook murmured in reply.

KING LION’S BED VIII. 22

KING LION, being weak and old,

Found on his stony couch his sleep did little good;

He could not rest his bones, nor yet keep out the cold;

And so he called to him the nobles of the wood,

The bears and wolves and all, – with downy coats or rough,
 And said: 'My friends, as age creeps on,
 I find my bed too hard to sleep upon;
 So can't you, doing naught that injures rich or poor,
 For one good mattress get me wool enough?
 I'm tired of sleeping on the floor!'
 'Most radiant majesty,' the nobles all replied:
 'Could any of us grudge, for you to spare
 Not only fur but hide?
 And is it few we have of beasts with tousled hair?
 Gazelle and chamois, goat and deer
 Pay hardly any tax each year;
 Then put a levy on the wool they wear!
 Don't think this tribute will displease them;
 Oh no, they'll find that it will ease them!'
 This excellent advice was followed on the spot.
 To praise their loyalty, the King no words had got!
 But how did they in deeds their loyalty declare?
 They fetched the poorest creatures there,
 And stripped and shaved them bare;
 Though they themselves had twice the fur to spare,
 'Twas not a single hair that their devotion cost;
 Each, on the contrary, that mixed in this affair,
 Of that same tribute took his share,
 And got his mattress for the winter frost.

THE THREE TOWNIES

VIII. 23

THERE came to a country inn three townies for the night;
 Here in the capital they'd plied the carter's trade;
 They'd seen the world, had earned, and paid,
 And now to village homes their country journey made;
 Hard-working men don't care to sleep without a bite:

They called the supper in; in country inns, they say,
 The menu's rather limited,
 A basin of thin soup, a little rice, some bread, –
 For three big hungry men, the leavings of the day.
 Not Petersburg, my boys; but still, you must confess,
 Better than going supperless.

They cross themselves, then heart and soul
 They set their noses to the bowl.

But one of them, – a smart young fellow he –
 Who sees the commons won't go round for three,
 Has planned to trick the other two;

(Where force is out of place, your wits must pull you
 through).

'You heard of Tom,' says he, 'why, Martha's Tom, you know;
 They's drawn the new recruits, and Tom will have to go.'
 'Recruits?' 'You haven't heard? Why yes, the China War
 To take away their tea and give it to the Tsar.'

Then both the two begin to argue and discuss –

(Alas, they both could read a paper through,
 And government reports they sometimes studied too),
 Of how the war would go, and who'd command for us.
 Each of these simple lads his crude ideas expresses

With theories, arguments, and guesses; –

But that was just our artful dodger's trick;

For he, while they debated, stated,

And all the armies regulated,

Was mum, and gobbled up the supper quick.

On things in no way us concerning
 Each loves his wits to exercise;
 The fate of India, with all its whens and whys,
 How clearly each can analyse!
 Yet look! Beneath your very eyes,
 Your house has nearly finished burning.

Book IX

IN Shepherd Sandy's flock – he kept the master's sheep –

The sheep were getting less and less;

So great was his distress,

It made this fine young fellow weep;

He oft was noticed crying, and let out:

'Friends, there's a dreadful wolf about!

He's started dragging all my sheep away,

And tears the pretty dears to pieces.'

'And that is no surprise,' they say;

'With wolves about, no sheep at peace is.'

They're all agog, that wolf to spy.

But how does Sandy's kitchen range supply

Now loin of lamb with groats, now soup with mutton bone?

He'd been a cook, but falling in disgrace,

Was sent to mind the flock at master's country place,

And so his cookery was rather like our own.

All hunt to catch the wolf; the wolf is blamed all round;

They search the forest through, but ne'er a wolf is found!

My friends, you waste your pains; the wolf idea came handy:

Who eats the sheep? Why, Sandy.

SQUIRREL ON HIS WHEEL¹

IX. 2

ON Sunday at the Hall,

Beneath a window, on the ground,

The country folk were staring one and all,

To see a squirrel on his wheel go round;

Upon a birch-tree near a thrush was watching too.

He ran so fast, his paws went whirling like the wind,

His fluffy tail spread out behind.

'Now come,' says Thrush, 'old fellow, tell us do,

¹ See VIII. 4.

What are you after? Won't you say?
 'Good friend, I'm hard at work all day;
 I'm special courier to a Minister of State;
 To eat, or drink, or take my breath,
 I have no time, I'm run to death!'
 And Squirrel starts again at yet a faster rate.
 Says Thrush, as he goes off: 'We see, you can't keep still;
 And yet, you never leave that window-sill.'

Just watch the busy fool, who thinks he's some one great!
 Folks stare: he fusses round, and can't be quieted;
 He twists and wriggles like an eel.
 And yet he never gets a yard ahead
 Like Squirrel on his wheel.

MICE

IX. 3

'It's awful, sister! Don't you know?'
 Upon a ship, one mouse to another said;
 'The vessel's sprung a leak! The water, down below
 Has so much spread,
 It reaches to my head!
 (She'd only wet her paws, when all was said.)
 And where's the wonder? Captain on this trip,
 Is always drunk, or hardly yet recovers!
 And then the sailors - each is lazier than the others,
 In fact, no kind of order on the ship!
 Just now, I shouted out, for all to hear:
 We're sinking, now and here;
 What use? There wasn't one that lent an ear,
 As if the news I spread were false and idle tales.
 Just peep into the hold! No earthly power
 Can keep the ship afloat another hour!
 Don't say, we're all to die, with every soul that sails.

Come on! We'll leave the ship without delay;
 Perhaps the land's not far away!
 So all these clever mice went over with one bound,
 And all got drowned.
 But our good vessel, steered by strong and skilful hand,
 Without the slightest harm, came safely home to land.
 And now no doubt you'll want to know
 The captain and the crew, the leak – was all that so?
 There was a leak, but none to mention,
 And stopped at once by close attention;
 And all the rest was pure invention.

FOX

IX. 4

ONE frosty morning in December,
 A fox stood drinking at an ice-hole, in the cold;
 Meanwhile, by carelessness or chance, I don't remember –
 He let his brush's tip
 Inside the water dip,
 Of which the ice took hold.
 Well, that was no great harm; there was not much to mind;
 Just one good pull, as soon as said,
 And leave, perhaps, a dozen hairs behind;
 Then off, in silence dead,
 While folks are still abed!
 But could he spoil his tail – a tail so soft and downy,
 So fluffy and so ruddy-brown?
 No! Better just to wait! There's not a soul to see;
 Before there is, who knows? There'll come a thaw, may be;
 The hole will give, the tail come free.
 He waits and waits; the tail gets faster still in prison;
 And see! The sun has risen.

Now folks are on their legs, and sounds of voices rise.

Oh, then, poor Fox, gets frightened.

He tugs and twists and tries!

No use: the tail is fast; the fatal grip has tightened.

By luck, a wolf comes up: 'Dear friend! Old chum! Papa!

Do save me!' cries the Fox. 'It's just in time you are!'

His trusty friend stood still,

And set about it with a will.

He chose a very simple way;

He neatly gnawed the tail away.

Untailed, our foolish fox made off for home full stride,

And thought himself in luck, that still he kept his hide.

To see this fable's point, I think you will not fail.

A hair just here or there the fox need not bewail,

If only he can keep his tail!

WOLVES AND SHEEP

IX. 5

THE wolves so plagued the sheep, that life was not worth
living;

It got so bad, that in the end,

The rulers of the beasts, their best attention giving,

Sought how the sheep they might defend.

So High Commissioners were summoned to attend;

Now, some of these were wolves, the truth to tell;

But wolves there are of whom report speaks well:

Such honourable wolves – and oft the story's told,

With proofs that cannot be rebutted –

Were seen to walk right past the fold

In perfect peace – when they were fairly gluttoned;

Then why refuse a vote to wolves of good repute?

The sheep may claim a hearing for their suit: –

No reason there, the wolves to persecute!

Deep in the forest's wilds the Council opens session,
 To every plea gives due expression,
 And drafts a law quite perfect and complete;
 And word for word, this law I here repeat: –
 'So soon as wolf on fold shall make aggression,
 And sheep thereby shall suffer from oppression,
 Then straightway shall that sheep be free,
 No matter who that wolf may be,
 To seize him by the throat, and drag to judgment-seat
 In nearest copse or wood.'
 There's nothing left to add, and nothing to delete;
 Only the way it works is not so good.ⁱ
 For though the court, they say, is scrupulously fair,
 The sheep may plaintiff or defendant be –
 The dragging's never done by him, and he
 Has yet to make his first appearance there.

PEASANT AND DOG

IX. 6

A PEASANT in a very prosperous way
 With house and farm, once took into his pay
 A dog – to guard the court from roving beggar's tread,
 To bake the bread,
 To water and to trim the garden every day.
 'Good Lord! What utter trash he writes!
 The indignant reader says: 'There's not the least pretence
 Of sense;
 Allow, he watched the yard at nights;
 But when did dogs bake bread, that anybody knows,
 Or trim and water cabbage-rows?'
 No, reader! My ideas are not so out of joint,
 That I should say they did, but that is not the point.

That Rover took the job – the point is there!
 He made the peasant pledge to pay him as for three;
 He'd do it on his head, as easy as can be!
 The peasant, at that time, was starting for the Fair,
 He went, and had his jaunt; the moment he got home,
 He looked, and wished he'd never come.
 Enough to throw him in a heat:
 No garden trimmed: no bread to eat;
 And then a thief, to double his despair,
 Had climbed into the yard and stripped the outhouse bare.
 At Rover's head he hurled a torrent of abuse;
 The dog, for everything, had got a good excuse;
 The baking he'd put off to trim the cabbage bed;
 The garden work itself, alas, had come to grief,
 Because it then was time to watch the yard instead;
 And at the moment when he missed the thief,
 He just was off to bake the bread.

TWO BOYS

IX. 7

'Hi! Georgie, have you heard? To-day we're let off cheap;
 We shan't be driven to school, like sheep!
 Come on! We've time to pick those chestnuts in the garden.'
 'Fred, if you think we're up to that, I beg your pardon;
 You know that tree; it's straight, and very bare;
 Nor you nor I can climb up there;
 Those chestnuts we shall never share!'
 'Oh, George, you are a chap to worry!
 If strength can't do the trick, our wits we'll have to hurry.
 No, no; I've got it! Listen now:
 You're just to hoist me to the lowest bough,
 And after that, I'll find the way;
 We'll sit and stuff on chestnuts all the day!'

Straight to the chestnut tree ran off those comrades staunch,
And Georgie gave a back, to help his partner climb;

Poor Georgie! He was panting all the time,
But Freddie in the end could clamber on the branch.

Fred scrambles to a handy spot;
Like mouse inside the bin, he here commands the lot.

What nuts! To endless meals they would have mounted;
They can't be counted.

Enough, Sir, to go on with, there,
And with your friend to share!

But no! It is not much that Georgie's profit spells!
Poor Georgie! At the foot he sits and licks his jaws;
He's watching Freddie feed, and waits for him to pause;

Fred throws his friend below, the shells –
And nothing else.

So lots of other Freddie's have behaved,
For whom their comrades slaved
To help them clamber up to riches, rank and title,
But never even saw a nutshell in requital.

ROBBER AND CARTER

IX. 8

Just off the road, to stop whoever went past,
A robber crouched at eve in little copse hard by;

Like bear still hungry from his winter's fast,

He swept the field with sullen eye.

Ah, there's a ponderous cart with load piled high!
'Oh, ho!' my robber growls, 'tis goods of heavy cost,
Bound for the Fair, I guess – all damask, cloth, brocade!
Now Stiff'un, take your chance, 'tis all expenses paid;
This means, to-day my trouble won't be lost.'

And now the cart comes by: 'Stop there!' the robber
cries,

And at the carter's head a sturdy blow he launches.
But hold! Not now his strength with rustic lout he tries;

The carter, stout and staunch is,
Holds good, even driven to his haunches,
And like a rock the assault defies.

The prey that he has sought
Can only now by fiercest fight he bought.
And long and furious the fight sways to and fro;
Of full a dozen teeth the robber's foe bereft him;
A hand was crushed and maimed, an eye had got to go;
Victorious in the end the battle left him;
He killed the carter in the fray,
He killed – and turned to seize the prey;
A load of toy balloons, was all he'd won to-day.

How often for a bubble,
A man will spare no crime, or cruelty or trouble.

LION AND MOUSE

IX. 9

to lion came a mouse, as humble as could be;
He wanted leave to live beneath a neighbouring tree;
He pleaded thus: 'Throughout our forest here
You're mighty and renowned;
There is no strength like Lion's I'll be bound,
And even your roar alone puts all the beasts in fear;
Yet who can tell, what chances may arise
Or just what service anyone might do?
And though I am so small in size,
It might be, even I could be of use to you.'

‘What, you!’ the lion cried. ‘You wretched little beast,
 To think such arrogance should fill you!
 You well deserve to die, at least!
 Get out of this, before I kill you!
 Get out! Or there’ll be nothing left.’

The mouse, in mortal fear, of all his wits bereft,
 Betook him to his legs, and left no trace behind.
 Yet soon the Lion’s pride its retribution met;
 One night he sallied forth, some toothsome meal to find,
 And fell into a net.
 Now vain was all his strength: no roars or groans assisted;
 No matter how he tore and twisted,
 The hunter had him fast, the trusty net resisted.
 They put him in a cage, and set him out on show.
 Too late he called to mind the mouse he’d scouted so;
 ‘How quick,’ thought he, his sad mischance reviewing,
 ‘Those tiny teeth could pierce the net that proved my ruin!
 Alas! my arrogance was my undoing!’

Good Reader, seeking after truth,
 I’ll add an extra word; ’twas told me in my youth.
 ’Tis not without good reason people say:
 ‘Don’t spit into the well: some day,
 You’ll want a drink, and turn that way.’

COCK AND CUCKOO

IX. 10

‘DEAR Cock, how loud you sing, how nobly too!’
 ‘But you, my Cuckoo dear, your song
 Pours out so even, sweet and long!
 There’s not in all our wood a songster such as you.’
 ‘Your fine top register, it thrills my bosom now!’
 ‘But you, my beauteous one, I vow,

The moment that you stop, I wait and wait in vain
To hear you start again.

I know not where you learn such notes, not I,
So pure, so tender, and so high.
But you were born like that – a little bird in size,
But as for music, where's your nightingale?'
'I thank you, friend, but you run up and down the scale
More featly than the bird of paradise;
Ask anyone; there's none gainsays.'
A passing sparrow cried: 'I like your pretty ways;
But sing each other's merits till you're hoarse –
'Tis wretched music all the same.'

And why, without a sign of shame,
Does Mr. Cock the Cuckoo praise?
'Cause Cuckoo praises Cock, of course!

A GREAT LORD

IX. II

IN olden times a personage of birth
From that rich damask bed that curtained him on earth,
To Pluto's dark domains his mournful passage plied –
To speak in plainer terms, he died,
And there, as custom rules, the gloomy judge must face.
At once they question him: 'What was your rank, your race?'
'In Persia I was born and served as Satrap long
But, seeing that in life my health was far from strong,
The cares of office could not carry,
And left all business to my secretary.'
'And you yourself?' 'Ate, drank and slept, contented
To sign whatever he for signature presented.'
'Well, pack him off to heaven!' 'Atrocious! I object,'
Cried Mercury in haste, forgetting all respect.

'My boy,' replied old Aeacus,
 'You wouldn't do for one of us,
 Why, can't you understand? This Satrap was a fool!
 What, if possessed of so much power,
 Himself in some unlucky hour
 Had tried his satrapy to rule?
 He would have wrecked the province, caused to fall
 A flood of tears that could not be forgiven!
 But no! He did no work at all;
 That's why he goes to heaven.'

I've just come out of Court; I watched the magistrate;
 Well, he, I rather think, will go to heaven straight.

LION AND MAN¹

IX. 12

YES, happy are the strong; the wise are happy thrice!
 To him who cares not to believe,
 Plain proof my present tale will give
 That strength unwitting proves a gift of little price.

His net from tree to tree spread out in due array,
 The Hunter couched, to wait his prey,
 But woke to find himself within the Lion's paws.
 'Die, puny creature!' hot with rage, the Lion cried;
 And fearsome yawned his angry jaws.
 'Let's see where are your claims – your strength, that
 courage tried,
 Which – oh, with what presumption – made you dream
 That you o'er all the beasts, even lions, are supremel
 Now you shall show me quickly – in my claws,
 How far your powers can match such overweening pride.'

¹ Omitted by Krylov from his later editions.

'Tis not in strength but mind, you'll find our vantage
lie,'

'Twas so the Hunter made reply.

'And I'll make bold to say

That there are obstacles where I can make my way,
And you, with strength that none can beat,
May have to own defeat!

'I'm tired of your conceit, and all the tales you tell!
'It is not tales, but deeds, for what I've said, I'll do;

And should this prove untrue,
Directly after, you can eat me just as well.

Now look! Knit close from tree to tree,

Like spider's web, you see

The labour of my hands, my net that spreads so wide.
Now which of us will pass the easier of the two?

If you prefer, 'tis I will first go through,
And later you shall show, with all your strength, how you
Can make your passage to the farther side.

The slightest breath of wind, and everyway 'tis blown;
And yet, be warned! – by strength alone,

When you must follow me, you will not make your
way.'

The net with scorn scarce deigning to survey,

'Be off then,' Lion cried in haughty tone;

'And by a straighter road, I'll come without delay.'

My hunter does not need a word to spare!

He dives and wriggles through, and waits the Lion there.

Like arrow from a bow, the reckless lion presses –

Alas, he has not learnt to dive beneath the meshes:

He plunges in the net, and ere the space is crossed,

Sticks fast! The hunter here cuts talk and business short;

'Tis shown, with strength unskilled wise wits can make
their sport,

And our poor Lion, in that deadly game – has lost!

ALL speckled sheep the Lion King abhorred;
Of course, to kill them off would not have taken long,
But that, of course, would be extremely wrong.

'Tis not for this the forest calls him lord;
For justice, not for wrath, he holds his lofty station,
And yet a speckled sheep to see he can't abide;
Then how get rid of them, yet keep his reputation?

He summons to his side

The bear and fox, and hastens to confide

His piteous tale to their devotion:

'To see a speckled sheep so hurts my eyes, I find –

The sight is simply undermined;

I see that in the end I surely shall go blind,

And how to deal with it, I have not got a notion!

The bear, he gives a scowl: 'Most puissant King,' says he,

'The matter's clear enough for me!

Without another word condemn

The sheep to be destroyed; why, no one cares for them.'

At this the Lion frowned, – of which the Fox took note.

He humbly lifts his voice: 'Oh King, our noble King,
I'm sure, to those poor beasts you'll never do a thing;

What! You a guiltless head devote?

A better plan I venture to suggest:

Allot them special fields, the fairest and the best,

Where ewes have grass to eat all day

And little lambs can frisk about and play;

And as of shepherds 'tis but very few we keep,

Give orders to the wolves to guard the sheep.

I somehow think – it's just a guess, no doubt, –

That sheep will anyhow be dying out.

Then let them now, at least, be free and happy there;

And if they die, they die; it won't be your affair.'

Then stand outside upon the mat;
 You'll get enough to eat, and thank your stars for that;
 This table is for guests to come,
 The beasts of largest size, and you're among the thinner,
 So if you do not care to take a stand-up dinner,
 Why, suit yourselves, and stay at home!

MIKE'S DINNER PARTY

IX. 15

THE Bear once gave a feast.
 He did not only ask all bears that he could find,
 But every other neighbouring beast, –
 Whoever caught his eye, whoever crossed his mind.
 Birthday, or christening, or family affair,
 I only know this feast did honour to the Bear.
 The guests had meat and drink in plenty and to spare.
 What dishes! What dessert! And oh, what wines were there!

Then Mike, to whom 'twas plain
 That all his guests were satisfied, got skittish,
 And right down merrily his friends to entertain,
 Made up all sorts of toasts, sang after-dinner ditties,
 And later, when the dogs began to clear the table,
 He danced as hard as he was able.
 The Fox, he claps his hands. 'Oh, Micky dear, how graceful!
 How cleverly you dance! How nice and light and tasteful!'

Wolf sat next Fox at Micky's board;
 He growled in Fox's ear: 'What trash you talk, oh lord!
 How can you rant like that of all this rough and tumble?
 What is there clever there? He dances like a dumb-bell.'
 Says Fox: 'You're talking trash yourself, you silly grinner:
 Why, don't you see? I praise the dancer for his dinner.
 If I can only feed his self-opinion up,
 Who knows? Perhaps he'll say we're all to stay and sup.'



